SIX YEARS
With A
GOVERNMENT MULE

BY GORDON JESSE WALKER

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Gordon Jesse Walker
author of **Load 'Em Up**
Tie 'Em Down

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SIX YEARS WITH A GOVERNMENT MULE

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Dedication

I started working for the U.S. Forest Service in 1953. My family and I spent the first six summers at a remote station called Lodgepole, on the Butte Falls Ranger District, Rogue River National Forest. My job included chasing smoke and using pack mules.

Working with Government mules became quite a challenge. They followed me up and down forest trails and across country for six summers. During fire season, I would be in the saddle seven days a week and all hours of the day and night. The thrills and spills and the rough and tumble life of a mule skinner became a part of me.

In later years, my wife, Bea, and five children, Don, Tricia, Janna, Leslie, and Tracy, encouraged me to write about some of the incidents and hair-raising events I experienced during our years at Lodgepole Guard Station.

After months of writing, and rewriting, and reams of paper later, I finished a book called, "Six Years With a Government Mule", in long hand. Now, to find someone who would take on the job of typing my stories.

A friend, and a long acquaintance of ours had heard about my unfinished script. She asked questions about its contents and volunteered to be my typist.

Mrs. Cleo Baker, took on the monumental task of putting it together. She not only accomplished the typing, but arranged chapters and assigned titles to each one. After months of correcting misspelled words and rearranging paragraphs, she finished typing the book. It included 36 chapters and over 300 typed pages.

Cleo, I will be forever grateful to you for typing my book and offering good, sound advice. If it wasn't for you, it may not have been printed. No one could have arranged the chapters, and put it in order like you did.

I wish to dedicate this book, "Six Years With a Government Mule" to you. Thank you for giving me a helping hand and encouraging words. You helped cause my dream to come true.

G.J.W.

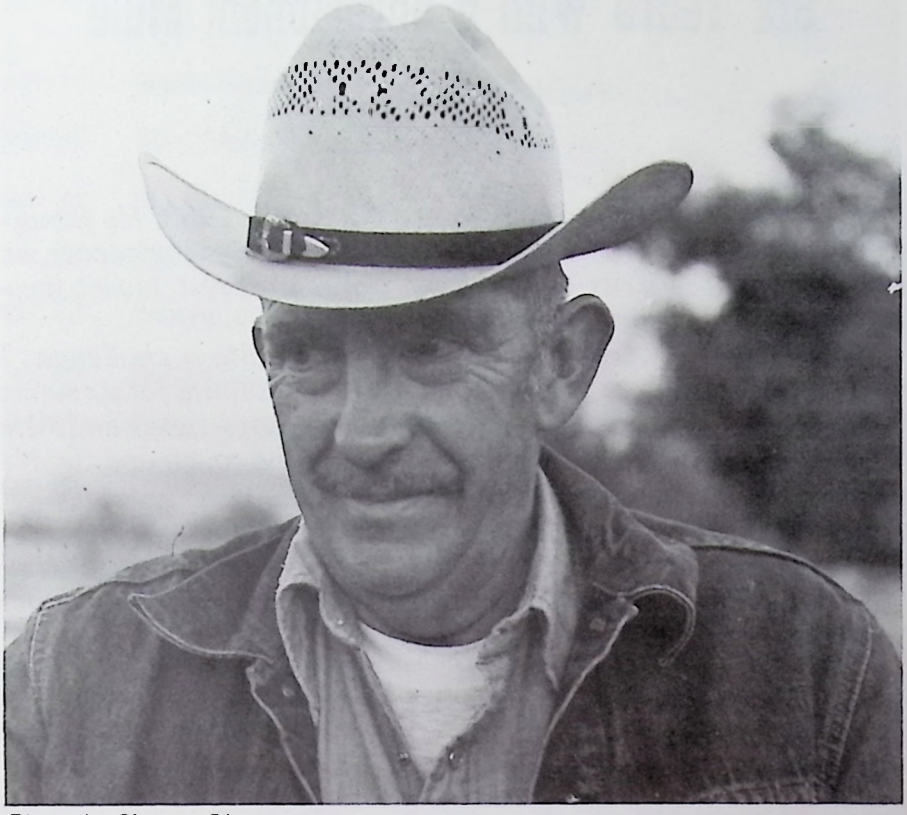


Photo by Sharon Olson

About the Author

My ancestors came to the Rogue River Valley in the early 1860's. Most of them raised cattle and other livestock for a living.

I was born in 1923 before the depression years. My folks had a post office, gas station and store at Beagle, located at the north end of the Rogue River Valley. In 1934 my dad got a job carrying mail. He ran the mail route for eight years.

I went to school at a place called Antioch. My oldest sister, Loretta, started there too.

I started working at age eleven. The work consisted of farming, orchard work and woodcutting. When I was 18 years old I fell and bucked timber with crosscut saws. I was a logger and sawmill worker until I was 30 years old.

Then I went to work for the U.S. Forest Service. That was where I got acquainted with the Government mules.

All my life I've been around cattle and horses and have been closely associated with pack mules for over 35 years. Working for the Forest Service was a continuous challenge, but the first and last six years were the highlight of my forestry career. When I retired after 31 years working on the Rogue River National Forest the last mule was retired with me. That day marked the end of an era, never to be revived on that Forest again.

Six Years With a Government Mule

By Gordon Jesse Walker

The mule skinner of by-gone days would laugh at the so-called modern up-to-date mule skinner. Packing heavy loads on mules is becoming a lost art. Too many contraptions like the Tote Gote and the Merry Packer have been brought into the picture by near-sighted people who were sure they were going to save the government some money. The idea being to faze out the pack mule and eliminate the winter feed bill. Then too, they thought a mule was dangerous. He might kick someone. No one ever talks about the injured backs and blistered hands caused by wrestling some kind of infernal machine that was meant to take the place of a mule or saddle horse. No one talks about the times the trail crews have breakdowns or lost their machines down a mountain because of faulty brakes. In the early 1900's, the Rogue River National Forest had several strings of pack mules. When I went to work for them, I didn't realize how soon someone would get the bright idea of doing away with the wonderful animals.

Many a person has watched me as I traveled along the trails, leading a string of pack mules and riding a good horse. I have been accused of having a paid vacation all summer long. A mule skinner's job is one of the hardest, most thankless jobs ever thought up by mankind. But for me, it was the most rewarding job I ever had. Lots of folks dream about how nice it would be to put a camping outfit on a mule and lead him to some remote area and really enjoy life in the great out-of-doors. Usually one trip is enough to convince them that there is a lot more to packing than meets the eye. What they find out on the first trip usually discourages the poor souls. They decide that most of the stories they've heard about packing are false. Maybe a mule skinner is a special breed of man who doesn't exist in these parts any more.

I started to work for the Forest Service on the Butte Falls Ranger District in March of 1953. My main job was smoke-chasing. When a fire was spotted in the forest, 1 would make the initial attack. This proved to be very exciting. In addition, I made pack trips to supply the back country fire lookouts, who spent all summer watching for fires in the forest. There were also supplies to pack to trail and recreation crews. And fire-fighting crews. When the fires were out, it would take several days to pack all the fire equipment back to civilization to be repaired for the next fire. Between times there were buildings to repair and fences to mend, but I spent about 85% of my time in the saddle leading a pack string up and down the trails. The hours were long and hard. Some pack trips lasted for several days. I spent a good many nights in the saddle while packing to and from forest fires.

The six years I spent working with the Government Mules included many thrills and spills, frustrations, anxious moments and a lot of fun. SIX YEARS WITH A GOVERNMENT MULE is the true story of the excitement and romance of being a mule skinner.

Thanks

I want to thank the following persons for their contributions to this publication.

Mrs. Cleo Baker, for her excellent job in typing the rough and final drafts, plus helping to arrange this book.

My wife, Bea, and children; Don, Tricia, Janna, Leslie, and Tracy for encouraging me to start writing, and their efforts in helping to keep the script moving, until completion.

My granddaughter, Kelly Rae Karjala, for typing the two pages that include dedication and thanks.

To all my friends and relatives, who encouraged me to continue writing and to those who gave me permission to use their names. Thanks to you all.

G.J.W

CHAPTER 1

FIRST TRIP WITH A GOVERNMENT MULE

My Forest Service career started at a little outpost called Lodgepole. It was located near the South Fork of Rogue River about fifteen miles northeast of the town called Butte Falls, Oregon. The first time I saw the place was when we were driving around during hunting season. From the cattle guard near the main road, we could see the buildings plainly.

There was about a thirty acre opening. The buildings were in the center on a slight rise. A neat little four room house was surrounded by a fenced-in yard. Small lodgepole pine trees grew along the north and east sides. The garage, woodshed and shop were outside the yard fence; and fifty feet away was another small building near the creek's bank. It was used to store gas and oil in. About one hundred yards south of the house was the barn. A saddle room was in one end, which was mouse and rat proof. There was a small corral behind the barn with a watering trough nearby. A long hitching rail stood about twenty feet from the saddle room door.

The corral and yard fence were made of heavy poles. Each post was at least fourteen inches in diameter. The ends of each pole were mortised into each post. The C. C. C. boys built it in the early 1930's.

The source of water was a spring located one-fourth of a mile up hill from the house. It was contained by a large cement reservoir. A two inch pipe line came from the spring to within fifty feet of the house, then tapered down to one half inch pipe to cause better water pressure. There was enough extra water to irrigate with and for fire protection.

The house was equipped with a modern bathroom, shower and all. Of course, there was never a lack of water for the horses and mules.

The name of my boss was Doug Finch. He was an outdoor man, of average height and build, wore cowboy boots and a western hat wherever you saw him. He had a heavy voice and talked rather slow sometimes. He knew his stuff when it came to teaching a bunch of men how to chase smoke and fight fires.

Doug had been raised around cattle and horses. Also, he knew enough about lashing a pack on a mule to help me catch on. He was the sort of man who got along well with everyone. Lucky for me, because of his good nature and being slow to anger, I'm still working for the U.S. Forest Service.

My Forest Service job consisted of being a combination smokechaser and mule skinner (packer). But my introduction to forest work was to be with the tree planting crew.

It was a nice sunshiny morning on the 9th day of March in 1953. The past ten years consisted of logging and sawmill work. The tree planting job

seemed like child play, something women and old folks could do. But because of a logging accident in which my right leg was broken between the knee and ankle, here I was. The doctor wouldn't release me for any kind of logging for at least another two years. So my new "light duty" job was a welcome change after being laid up for almost a year.

After most of the thousands of pine trees were planted, Doug planned a day so he and I could drive out to the pasture where all the horses and mules were kept through the winter months.

Three big black "Government mules" were the first ones to run into the corral, where maybe they would get a bucket filled with oats. At that time, there were only three saddle horses.

Bowen Creek pasture was about four hundred acres in size. At the northeast side, stood a small barn where hay was stored. Two big feed racks were situated under some pine trees where the stock were fed.

This is where government stock wintered

A pole corral was attached to the barn so in effect, three sides were pole fence and one side was the barn. There were gates next to the barn on the east and west side.

Doug and I sat on the corral fence and watched the horses and mules eat. He pointed to each mule and told me its name and talked about a few of their habits, good and bad - mostly bad. Their names were Tom, Dillon and Austin. The horses habits were mild compared to the Government mules.

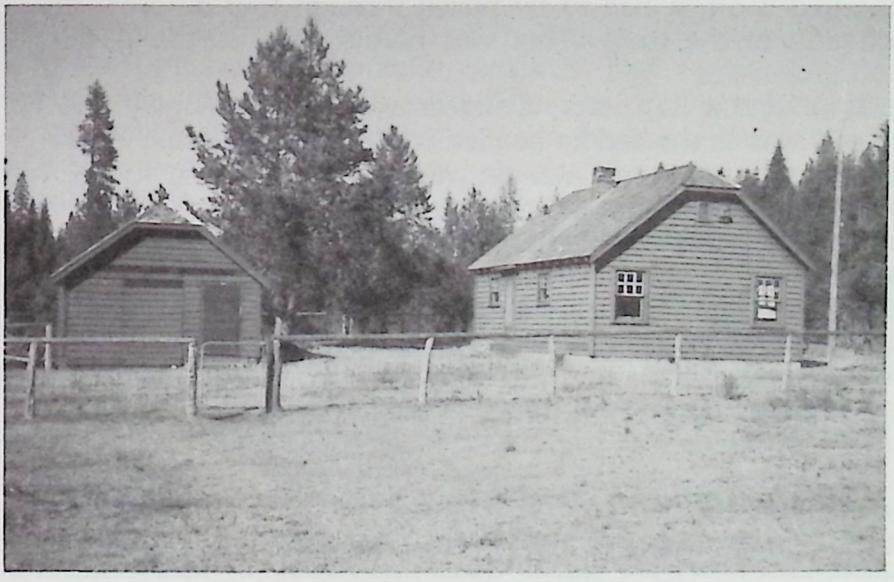
I had worked with cattle and horses all my life and spent many a long, hard day and night in the saddle; but these pack mules were new to me. In looking them over, it never occurred to me that my first year working with a string of Government pack mules would very nearly drive me back to herding cows.

Tom was my favorite from the start because his only bad habit was being hard to catch. Dillon could kick a gnat between the eyes with both hind feet before it had time to blink; but Austin was the bad one. He was quick as a cat and would come undone like a clock spring without giving it any thought at all. At that time, they used mostly mares to lead the mules. Someone had an idea the mules would lead easier following a mare (female horse).

Doug told me a lot of things that day, which included how to put packs on the mules and some of the problems that might come up.

Later I found out that he didn't quite cover all the things that could happen. What's more, I know there isn't a book printed that has all the answers about how to cope with a pack mule. Doug mentioned some of the articles I would be packing - such as food, fire equipment and lumber; but he said nothing about what to do when a trail crew foreman wanted me to put a lemon cream pie on a mule and pack it several miles to camp.

Doug and I took the horses and mules to Lodgepole. From the winter pasture to their summer home was a twenty-five mile ride. The next day I borrowed a truck and moved my family from Butte Falls to live with me in our wilderness Forest Service home. Don was four years old, Tricia was two and Janna was just a year old. The yard was fenced in with big long poles held up by sturdy posts, which looked very rustic. It was an ideal place for the kids to play. Wild strawberries grew everywhere and the lawn was full of the ripe fruit. One of the first things the exploring children turned up was the strawberries. Usually we could find them down on their hands and knees picking berries.



Lodgepole Guard Station

I had a tough time working with the horses and mules to try to get them civilized. The past packers hadn't taught them how to be easily caught. It took a lot of oats and currying to get them to come when I whistled. Lots of repair work had to be done on the barn and corral. Other buildings needed to be cleaned or painted. One thing surprised me to no end. By the shape everything was in around Lodgepole, it looked like no one had ever lifted a finger to repair a thing for several years.

We had been at Lodgepole for three days and were pretty well settled down to a new line of work when Doug paid us a visit to see how things were shaping up and to tell me about our first pack trip, which would be the next day.

That year, the road to Rustler Peak Lookout hadn't been opened up. Snowdrifts blocked the road the entire three miles from Parker Meadows to the tower. Supplies would have to be taken in over the snow by pack mule. Manley and Hi Bryant would walk the three miles when they went in. For the sixth year in a row, Rustler Peak Lookout would be their summer home, where they kept an eye out for fires in the forest.

On the day of the big trip, I rolled out early and caught Dillon and Austin and tied them to the hitching rail. Pack saddles, boxes, pack covers and lash rope were piled up nearby. Doug drove in about 8:00 a.m. and we started packing.

I watched every move Doug made as each article was put in place. We had a tough time putting pack covers over the loads; but finally, with a lot of effort, the white canvas covers were on and lash ropes held everything secure. The lash-up that Doug tied the loads down with had me stumped. He didn't like the diamond hitch for some reason, so he had invented a hitch of his own. He used a 50 foot length of half-inch rope; and at each place he tied it off, it had to be pulled through four different times, twice on each side of the mule. That was harder than all the packing put together.

An hour and a half later, Doug drove off with Manley and Hi in the truck; and I was in the saddle headed toward Rustler Peak. Austin spooked at something and seconds later he was going round and round, half bucking and kicking at the supplies as they fell from the pack. Dillon moved out of his way to let him kick. There I was, my first pack trip, and the first bucked-off load! It was lucky for me that the lash rope was 50 feet long because when I got through putting the load back together and tying it down, another ten feet would have been welcome. I really had a farmer's wind on Austin's pack. The lash rope was around everything that looked loose, and I tied the end of the rope to the pack saddle. Dillon's load kept getting more lopsided all the time. Finally it fell off too; and half an hour later, his load looked alot like Austin's. Forty feet of rope would have been plenty for his load.

I rode along, climbing uphill, following an old road. Soon the first snowdrift came into view. It was about two feet deep. Much to my surprise, the mules barely made tracks in the frozen drifts. It eased my mind somewhat because if it was going to be that easy, we would be home by noon. The drifts got deeper as we rode higher, but still the mules walked right

over the top. Finally it was all snow and no bare ground anywhere and the road disappeared. Doug had told me this would happen and had advised me which way to go after that.

Up ahead there was an opening in the timber. It seemed logical to head for that and get out of the timber where there were so many holes around the big trees. The sun was shining bright and it never occurred to me that in the opening the snow might be soft. We entered the opening toward the top and about halfway across, Austin broke through the hard crust and down he went. He slid for nearly a hundred feet down the steep mountainside, his legs pointed uphill. I watched in amazement as he disappeared in a hole at the foot of a big fir tree. Dillon went down too, but managed to flounder on across to the timber beyond. Doug caught up with us on his saddle horse just in time to see all this happen. The saddle horses broke through the crusted surface and began to flounder in the rotten snow, too. One of them almost trampled Doug in its struggle to stand up.

By the awful sound coming from the hole around the tree, I knew Austin must be about done for. He would take in a deep breath, then let it out, making long, squeaking, gurgling sounds with a moan now and then like his breathing had ceased. In looking back, I believe the only thing wrong with Austin was the embarrassment of his predicament.

How would we ever get him out of that hole without a crew of men with shovels? The snow was about eight feet deep and Austin was almost down to the ground, lying on his back in the hole. In the spring of the year when the snow begins to melt, it leaves a round hole around every tree. The tree reflects enough heat to cause it to melt away faster than the surrounding area. As the snow thaws out in the daytime and freezes up again at night, it makes it rough to get around in timbered country because of the tree holes.

But Doug knew what to do. One of the things he had pointed out to me, was to always carry a sharp knife, which he had. He climbed down in the hole and began to cut the lash rope. After the pack was free, we stood back out of the way. Doug stood where Austin could see him and suddenly he slapped his chaps and let out a war whoop. Not realizing he was loose from his load, Austin put every ounce of strength in a lunge and flew out of the hole like a jack-in-the-box. He shook himself and fairly tip-toed over to where the other stock stood.

Doug knew what was in store for us now. We would have to unpack Dillon and start the long hard climb on foot over the snow to the lookout tower and carry all the stuff on our backs. We would have to make several trips. Each pack box or bag has two straps attached to the top corners at the back part next to the mule. The buckled straps form a loop which is hooked over the saw-buck type pack saddle. The bags or boxes weigh quite a bit sometimes, especially when each one is filled with canned goods. To pack the supplies to the lookout, we slipped an arm through each of these straps and carried them like pack sacks. What a job it was! I slipped forward once and bit a chunk out of a rotten log when I fell face down. It took several hours and several trips to get the job done.

We got back to Lodgepole just before dark. I unsaddled the horses and

mules and looked for rubs and injuries. My back and shoulders felt sore and burned a little. We peeled off our shirts and sure enough, our backbones were rubbed raw and bleeding. My rubbed places were the worst because I was skinnier. I offered to doctor Doug's sore spots like I would doctor a rub on a horse, but he wouldn't stand still.

That evening after supper, I sat there in the front room with my feet propped up toward the heating stove and thought of all that had happened on my first pack trip. I wondered if I ever would be a mule skinner and live to tell about it. Sure hoped the snow would be gone before another pack trip had to be made.

Bea and the kids looked at the rubbed places on my back and collar bone. They tried to console me by insisting there would be brighter days ahead. Of course, I knew there would be, all right; but more than likely most of those days would be for them not me.

Stella, the last of the Rogue River mules

CHAPTER 2

BLUE CANYON DRAG

For the next two days I worked from sun-up till dark trying to get things patched up around the station. During that time Doug took the Devil's Peak lookout up and got him squared away. The evenings were cold after sundown and I was just starting a little fire in the wood heater when the phone rang. It was Doug. He told me to catch three mules the next morning and call his home around 5:00 a.m. for more instructions. He said to pack a big lunch, because it would be a long day. Working as a packer out of Lodgepole wasn't a job for a clockwatcher. My hours started early and ended late, and I got paid for an eight hour day.

At 3:30 the next morning I managed to pry myself out of bed and to get a fire going in the kitchen stove. The coffee pot was filled with water and set on the spot where it would get hot quick. It was pitch dark outside, but I knew I could get the horses and mules into the corral. Sometimes it is difficult to put a halter on a mule in the dark, but everybody got caught and tied up so they could eat a ration of oats. Now back to the house for some breakfast for me.

At 5:00 a.m. right on schedule, I called Doug. He wanted me to be at the Upper South Fork Forest Camp about eight miles from Lodgepole at 7:00 if possible. The trail crew would meet me there with their supplies and equipment to be packed into Blue Canyon. Doug would be on hand to help me get lined out.

My wife, Bea, and the three kids were up by now. If they wanted to, they could haul all my pack rigging to the trailhead for me. It wouldn't take but a moment to hook the two wheel trailer to our car and pile the pack saddles, boxes, bags and lash rope on and tie it down. It sounded like fun to my family. That would give me an hours head start so maybe I would be up there before they caught up with me.

It didn't take me long to saddle up. It was just getting light when I rode out of Lodgepole leading three spooky mules and riding a horse that wasn't any better. We were several miles from the home corral before my mount began to settle down and act decent. Eight miles out, the horse and mules clattered across the bridge and swung downriver into a little cove where we could wait for the trail crew. It was ten minutes till 7:00 a.m.

The three mules and my saddle horse were tied up on separate trees and beginning to settle down some when the rumble of a car motor caused them to prick up their ears. It was my car with Bea and the kids hauling the pack rigging to me. They drove up slow and the two oldest kids jumped out and came running to me. Bea came on over with Janna sitting on one arm, her big blue eyes just sparkling with excitement. We unloaded the rigs and put them on the mules while Bea and the kids watched. My wife decided she had better take the kids back to Lodgepole and settle down to the daily routine. They told me

goodbye and I stood and watched as they drove away with the two wheel trailer bouncing along behind.

A deer dashed off through the brush. Birds and squirrels chirped and chattered when their routine was disturbed. At 8:00 there was still no trail crew in sight. It appeared that this was another one of those hurry-up-and-wait trips and I sat down with my back against a tree and tapped the ground with a stick. At 10:00 not a soul had showed up.

Finally, at long last the trail crew arrived. Harold Arnold and Corbett Smith climbed out of an International 4 x 4 army surplus pickup and walked over toward me. Harold was the first one to speak. He said he was sorry about being late but my wife had some car trouble about three miles down the road and they had to stop and make some minor repairs so she could go home. It seems as though the battery fell out of the carrier and jerked loose from the ground wire. The motor quit and of course the starter wouldn't work. While Corbett talked to Don and Tricia and kept an eye on Janna, Harold and Bea somehow fastened the battery back in the carrier good enough to get them home. It took about an hour to do the job. They assured me that if Bea had to make a trip to town, it would stay put. Maybe tomorrow better repairs could be made. I appreciated what the men had done and forgave them for being late.

Soon Doug drove up with his pickup loaded down with supplies and equipment. We were all surprised when he told me that everything would go except the spare tire. I helped load the mules— as much as Doug would allow me to. All the time he was packing, he was telling me lots of "do's" and "don'ts". As he pulled the rope tight on the last mule load, a butcher knife punched through the pack cover and the rope slid down along the sharp edge. It cut the rope in two. It took me another half hour to splice the severed rope, then Doug repacked the load. I rolled the knife up in a burlap oat sack so it wouldn't be so dangerous.

By 1:00 o'clock, I was in the saddle on my way up the trail headed for Horseshoe Lake in Blue Canyon, where the trail crew would set up their base camp. It was nine miles and all uphill to my destination.

The trail follows along the South Fork of Rogue River for about five miles, then it crosses over and goes past a small lake or two. The headwaters of the South Fork of Rogue River are the lakes in Blue Canyon. The Cascade Mountains in this area are full of springs. They range in size from a small trickle of water to giant gushers roaring out of the mountainside. Each spring forms a stream of water twisting it's way down the slopes heading for larger streams like the great Rogue River. It was one of the smaller streams that caused me a lot of trouble.

We passed the one-mile sign in half an hour. Real good! Now there were eight more miles to go. Little did I realize that it would be two hours before the two-mile sign would show up. Water runs from the springs the year around. Some of the streams cut deep ditches across openings, but not very wide. One of these ditches had cut the trail in two. Tom and Dillon jumped over the narrow channel just as easily as Sundee did, but Austin saw the swift water under his nose and reared back. He refused to cross the moving water. Somehow the mule had to be persuaded to jump the little ditch.

It doesn't do any good to try to force a mule to move unless you are stout

enough to slide him along. Pulling, driving, coaxing and just riding on up the trail didn't produce a thing. Austin stood his ground and wouldn't budge. I got down to adjust his pack some, and maybe lead him on foot. That's when Tom got to fooling around and got down in a bog hole, belly-deep. Things were getting worse. The old boy had only been trying to reach a nice tall clump of grass, which was growing from a hump of ground in the center of a swampy area. I watched helplessly as he began to flounder around.

It looked for sure like my sharp knife would come in handy. His lash rope would have to be cut in several places if he got down in that mud hole. That was the only way the mule could ever get out.

After a couple more tries, he got his front feet on solid ground, rested a moment and lunged out of the muddy trap. All the fuss didn't help my pack job a bit. The ropes came loose and a three burner gas stove fell off and started sinking slowly in the mire.

While trying to reason with Austin, after rescuing the stove, I heard another noise which really made me feel like giving up. Sundee, my saddle mare, was so deep in quicksand that the skirts of my saddle were under water and sand. What would happen next?

Luckily, Sundee didn't get excited. She managed to get one front leg out and the other one almost out of the quicksand bog. She had turned a little to one side, resting on a clump of bog huckleberries. With her next lunge, it gave her enough solid footing to pull herself free.

She walked over and stood by Tom, looking longingly at the nice green patch of grass. I suppose she was trying to figure how the grass could grow in such a terrifying place.

Time was running short and there was still about seven and a half miles yet to ride, not to mention the return trip. The only thing left to do was to unpack Austin, tie him to a tree and go on. I repacked Tom and Dillon and divided Austin's load between them. We proceeded on up the trail and left Austin tied short to a tree, wondering what kind of a deal this was. In a short while the two mile marker showed up ahead of me, nailed to a tall slim hemlock tree.

I rode along enjoying the new country, but still wondering what might happen next. Finally the three-mile marker showed up ahead, mounted high on a Shasta fir. Suddenly the mules stopped, nearly yanking me from the saddle. Tom's pack fell off and he was going round and round with Dillon trying to stay out of the way. Sundee tried to run off, but wasn't too hard to get under control.

After about three circles Tom stopped. I walked up to him and found that one of my trouble-makers was the old single-cinch rig. It just wouldn't stay put with a heavy load. The lid had come off a can of coffee and spilled the contents. There was a large circle of coffee grounds, all two pounds of it. The trail crew would rather lose a dozen eggs than have to do without their coffee.

While repacking Tom, the lash up was modified some, mostly because my memory failed me as to how Doug had done it. It seemed to hold as we went on up the trail. A ruffled grouse flew up from under my horse's nose. She started to rear up and buck. Dillon slid backward through his whole outfit. Tom must have been expecting something to happen because all he did was back up and flop his big ears around.

At 6:00 o'clock in the afternoon, Horseshoe Lake showed bright and clear through the trees ahead. Such a beautiful place it was. The water was clear and deep. Three nice Eastern brook trout were swimming near a big rock close to the bank. Some campers were set up a few yards away, with a campfire smoldering, cooking their supper. I unpacked and unsaddled everyone to look for rubbed spots and injuries. Everything looked good.

All the food was put in sacks and hung high on a tree limb. The bedrolls, tent and personal gear had to be hung up too, so the deer wouldn't chew holes in it. My hopes were that the trail crew would get to camp before a bear came along and ate their food. I resaddled the pack mules and tied the empty boxes to their packs. Nothing had to look too fancy now. When the heavy riding saddle was put back on Sundee, she acted a little silly, like she might try and buck me off. She soon settled down and I climbed up and headed for home.

We went past the other camp and noticed a young woman lying on a bed made of tree boughs. She spoke to me and asked whether there was a first aid kit in my saddle bags. She had no shoes on and her feet looked swollen. The girl told me that she and some friends had walked to Horseshoe Lake from the Blue Rock Saddle about three miles away. Her feet were badly blistered from wearing loose-fitting shoes. I gave her my first aid kit and rode on down the trail, hoping she would survive.

Tom and Dillon followed along like two mules should. Not having to worry too much about losing a load, I enjoyed the beautiful scenery along the trail. Just beyond Horseshoe Lake there is a spot called Meadow Lake. At first it looked like a big shallow mudhole. But a large sized trout leaped from the water and splashed back, no doubt enjoying a nice fat bug of some kind. At the south end of the lake is a broad meadow. There is a good cold spring between the trail and the edge of the opening. Campers get their drinking water there. To the left of the trail near Meadow Lake, is Blue Lake, laying at the foot of a big cliff. The water is deep and so blue it's almost black. Many large fish have been caught from its waters.

From Blue Lake the trail starts downhill. About a mile or so down I rode past Beal Lake, a sparkling little beauty-spot laying in a shallow canyon to the left of the trail. I felt like spending some time here, and maybe going for a swim. From here on down, the huckleberry brush grows thick and about three feet tall. At times the trail was barely visible, but Sundee knew the way. Two more grouse flew out and scared the daylights out of everyone, including me.

The two-mile sign showed up sooner than expected. Austin started braying his head off as we rode up, which made me feel like knocking him down. I put his pack back on him, tied down the empty boxes and anchored the lead rope to his pack hoping he would follow along down the trail. Or maybe he would run away and we wouldn't have to fool with him anymore.

With Tom tied to Dillon and lead rope in hand, I climbed up in the saddle and headed out. I looked back and saw a sight that made me pull up short. Austin had jumped the little ditch and was standing in the center of the boghole on the clump of grass enjoying himself immensely. All four feet were almost touching. He was trying to stay put until he had cropped off all the grass. As I sat there, half amazed and half disgusted, he raised his head, brayed once and leaped to solid ground like a cat. Then he came dashing down the trail to catch

up. There wasn't too much that could be done except ride on toward Lodgepole and try to figure out what makes a mule tick. We rode in to Lodgepole about an hour after dark.

This day was really an example of what the future held for me in the years to come. Austin would have been my constant companion and a continuous challenge to the abilities of a mule skinner. He knew all the tricks when it came to being a pack mule. Hence, the challenge to try and outsmart that most intelligent creature was a challenge to a mule skinner's capabilities.

CHAPTER 3

PACK STRING TO KING SPRUCE

My family enjoyed watching deer come to the salt block near the barn. Chipmunks scampered everywhere. The kids constructed small dams in the little creek that twisted its way down through the horse pasture. Each dam was engineered by Don, and Tricia and Janna worked knee-deep in mud and water doing the work. Lodgepole house sat on a small knoll and the grass stayed green the year round. There wasn't a thing around to hurt the kids except now and then a yellow jacket's nest. The high altitude, fresh air and sunshine gave them an appetite that caused them to eat from daylight until bedtime.

One afternoon I was working on pack rigs down at the barn. The best way

Left to right – Tricia, Janna and Don, Easter Sunday

was to take each pack saddle and lay it out flat on the ground. Each strap and latigo could be examined easily and replaced if necessary. There were eight rigs laying all over the place when the phone rang. It was Doug calling to inform me of another pack trip. There would be a five-man crew going to King Spruce country to spray poison on a plant called Larkspur. It covered quite a large area, and cattle that ate the poisonous plant would die. Doug would be up in the morning with a hundred gallons of liquid weed poison and some spray guns.

Next morning things started out badly. Sundee acted a fool. She seemed

to be getting spoiled. I just got her settled down when the wind blew the saddle-room door shut and Austin nearly jumped over the hitching rail. Even Dillon kicked at me a couple of times. Tom was the only one who didn't show off. But with it all, everybody was saddled and ready to go before Doug showed up. We packed the stock and I headed up the trail behind the trail crew. They were clearing debris and downed trees out of the trail. The three heavy loads rode good because they were easy to balance.

The Seven Lakes Trail crosses Nichols Creek at Black Bear Camp, not too far beyond Black Bear Swamp. From there on, it was an uphill grind for at least three miles. At King Spruce Junction the trail leveled off for a ways and then we dropped down to King Spruce Flat and I understood where the country got its name.

King Spruce country got its name because of the huge Englemann Spruce trees which grow there. They measure up to six feet in diameter shoulder high. The difference between this specie of tree and the Douglas-fir and the different types of pine and alpine fir, is that the end of each needle has a very sharp point. The trees grow straight up like a fir or pine, but the foliage is thick and dark green. The bark on a spruce tree is smoother than most but the outer layer has a scaly appearance.

An Englemann Spruce grows where there is plenty of water, like in low places or draws where the water table is high. A ten or fifteen year old spruce looks as though it would make a dandy Christmas tree; but don't let its beautiful, tight, dark green foliage, shaped symmetrical, fool you. Because of its stickery needles, it is miserable to cut down and pack out of the woods. After it is mounted on a tree stand in the corner of the living room, it looks like it was well worth the effort of getting punctured and scratched as you dragged and carried it down out of the forest. The heavy limbs hold the Christmas tree lights up well and all the other tree decorations look so nice. Then, after a day or two in the warm house, you notice a peculiar smell. It reminds you of the times while the kids were little and you left a couple of wet baby diapers laying too close to the fireplace. The beautiful little Englemann Spruce is starting to get even for giving up its life so as to become a decoration for Christmas. Another very annoying thing about the tree was that when little hands reached out to touch the fluffy looking boughs, the sharp pointed needles punctured tender skin and caused much sorrow and grief. The little kids slowly began to think that Christmas trees were put there to hurt them rather than bring joy and happiness to their little souls. But because of all the work you went to and the fact that Christmas was only a few days away, was reason enough to tolerate the unpleasant smell and hope that the bandaids held out until the faithful day arrived when the tree could be taken down and hauled away.

Anyhow, King Spruce Canyon got its name because of several huge Englemann spruce scattered about and they all remain there, untouched by human hands, to this day.

Evidence of a hunter's camp by the creek indicated that a few people enjoyed camping there. Other trees included the tall slim Alpine fir and Hemlock, with a few Douglas fir scattered around. The bottom of King Spruce Canyon is flat, and the trail goes across it, marked by a post now and then.

About halfway up the other side was the spot where the loads would be

taken off the mules and put in a special place where deer wouldn't knock the cans over. After locating a place, I got the mules unloaded and loosened the cinches,then found a spot to sit down and eat my lunch. It was there that a chinquapin burr came to my attention. When I sat down, my hand came into contact with one and I had to dig a couple of thorns from my thumb.

As we enjoyed the scenery west of us, we noticed a column of smoke rising in the distance. I turned on my forest radio and called Rustler Peak Lookout. Sure enough, about three miles south of Lodgepole, a fire was burning hot. It had been started by a lightning storm a week ago, and it had smoldered all during that time before it blazed up again. Fires like this are called sleeper fires. They lay low for so long in an old rotten log, or deep limbs and needles, that when the sun finally dries things out, a little breeze will fan the fire to life and away it goes.

If only I could have been there, it would have been my first real fire. There was no reason for me to go tearing down the mountain to help fight the fire. There were men and pumpers on the way. Besides, they might need a night crew to help by the time we got back to Lodgepole.

After lunch,the mules were cinched up and repacked with empty bags and boxes ready for the long trip home. On my way down and across King Spruce Canyon, more things came to my attention. There used to be a fire guard station near the creek and part of the old foundation was still visible. A smoke chaser once lived there so he would be available to fight fires. He was connected to the outside world by a telephone line which he maintained. Then most of King Spruce Canyon had been fenced off to pasture a couple of mules and a saddle horse. It would have been wonderful to have worked for the Forest Service in those days. What a perfect life to live, to be a smoke chaser and mule skinner at King Spruce.

We headed up the trail and topped the ridge west of King Spruce. The old trail dropped down around the point through a thick patch of hemlock and came out into open timber. I could see the smoke through the trees from the fire on Rustler Peak. There was a lot more of it and was blacker now.

We came in sight of Lodgepole around 5:00. The kids couldn't wait to tell me the news. In fact I rode past the hitching rail at the barn and went on up to the yard fence, where I got to listen to their story. Don was the first one to speak. He had spotted the fire even before the lookout saw it. The kids learned to scan the countryside for fires when they were little, mostly because they had heard so much about fire-fighting. The fire was straight down the mountain and over a ridge from Rustler Peak Lookout. The smoke had to be pretty high before Manley could see it. At Lodgepole the kids could look right at it.

Don had run to tell his mother. She didn't know what to do or how to work the Forest telephone yet. While she and the kids were figuring it out, the phone rang and about scared them out of their wits. Bea lifted the receiver to listen. Rustler Peak was turning in the smoke. From that moment on, the phone was off the hook as my family listened in on the excitement of a real forest fire out of control.

Don told me that there were twelve men and two pumpers on the fire. It was near the Section Nine Spur on Rustler Peak. The size of the fire was at

least one acre. Don, Tricia and Janna sat in the yard and watched the smoke until the no-see-ums and mosquitoes drove them into the house just before dark.

We ate supper before I called Doug to let him know my trip was a success. He had it figured out for me to go up the next day and work with the crew. By 6:00 a.m., I was on the fireline helping mop up. We had to dig out burning stumps and buried logs. The fire was burning at the edge of an old log landing. There were several burned snags to fall and the fireline had to be widened. Seven of us spent two days mopping up the fire. Every spark was put dead out.

Since my job was a one-man initial attack force, all my equipment, including my smoke-chasing car, had to be right up to snuff. Hundreds of acres were inaccessible by road, therefore the smoke-chaser had to hit the brush on foot with only a compass to guide him to the fire. For myself, my car was special, a 1937 Chevrolet Coupe, used for traveling to fires and other Forest Service work.

My fire pack was always ready and waiting in the trunk. The car would travel over logging roads as far as any road went. From there, it was a foot-traveling show to the fire.

All fire-fighters must attend a special fire-training school, where they learn how to suppress small fires. Each man is furnished with a pack sack, which contains special fire-fighting equipment. Safety in our work was always stressed. During the fire season, Doug would set a test fire now and then to keep us on our toes. Sometimes these were much harder to find than the real thing. But one thing about it, the training of us smoke-chasers proved to be quite valuable when it came to the real thing.

CHAPTER 4

LODGEPOLE LIVING AND LONG TRIP TO DEVIL'S PEAK

As time went on, many interesting and new things happened to us. Doug called one day to ask me to have two mules and one saddle horse ready to go by 8:00 the next morning. He would make a trip to Bessie Rock. This meant that I would have to ride and lead the stock to Imnaha Guard Station five miles to the north of Lodgepole.

With my riding saddle on Sundee and the pack saddles on Austin and Dillon, we started out. The first two miles are fairly level, then there is a series of switch-backs down a steep grade to the South Fork of Rogue River. The crossing was deep that year and it was difficult to ford the river. Austin figured he would pull another stunt on me at the crossing.

Since the last time he and I had a round-up, I had learned a few tricks myself. I got down and tied up the lead ropes on both mules to see what would happen. They might have to be run down if they took a notion to head for home. Back in the saddle, Sundee responded to my spurs and down the bank she went. The water was swift and almost deep enough to make her swim. We made it across in good shape, except my boot on the upstream side got filled with water. We kept going up the trail a few yards, then I turned in the saddle to look for my mules.

Dillon hit the water first and down he went. He recovered quickly and half swam, half walked to the far bank. Austin let out a loud bray and in he went with head held high, and his long ears pointing straight up. He raised clear out of the water on his hind legs and gave another long jump. About four more jumps and he was on dry ground. He stood there and shook himself like a dog, then up the trail he came. From that day on, I never tried to lead Austin. He was a mule who had a mind of his own; and what's more, he intended to prove it.

There were two more streams to cross, the ford at Wallowa Creek and the one at Imnaha Creek. Austin crossed these streams the same as he did the river. I really couldn't blame him much because the water was ice cold. It looked like his teeth were chattering each time he made a crossing.

Imnaha Guard Station is a beautiful place. A smoke-chaser and his family lived there all summer. His other duties included recreation and road maintenance. The house has three rooms. It includes a kitchen, a front room with a large fireplace and one bedroom. A combination woodshed, toolroom and garage was near the house. The barn is a hundred yards from the house, with a corral and a ten acre irrigated pasture surrounding three sides.

Sundee and the two mules were perfectly content to be there, knowing

they would get a bucket of oats each,the same as at Lodgepole, and enough hay to last all night. Tomorrow would be a sixteen mile trip. I drank coffee and swapped yarns with the man on duty until my wife and three kids drove over to pick me up. Needless to say, I was a bit put out because Doug wouldn't let me go along on tomorrow's trip.

It was dark before we headed back to Lodgepole. We drove slowly in case we spotted a porcupine. After hours, we often hunted porcupines for the fun of it. The Forest Service encouraged us to kill the animals. Porcupines ruin pine and fir trees by eating the bark from the tree tops. All eyes were wide and alert as we drove along. Cottontail rabbits scampered across in front of us. We saw one coyote and numerous deer. One doe had a set of spotted fawns with her.

We crossed Spring Creek and Don spotted a black looking object moving along in the ditch near the bank. It was a big porcupine. With the lights on bright beam, I jumped from the car with my gun to shoot at the quilly tree-killer. Up the bank he went with me in hot pursuit, blazing away at the mass of quills. You can imagine what was going on back at the car. The three kids and their mother were shouting orders. Don wanted to get out and help kill the animal. Tricia and Janna were squealing and jumping up and down, much to their mother's disgust. The animal is hard to kill sometimes, but with the last shot, his career of bark-chewing came to an end. I brought him back to the beam of the headlights so the children could get out and get a close look at the porcupine.

We took a shovel from the trunk of the car and dug a deep hole at the edge of the timber. I explained that what we were doing was a good idea because the dead animal wouldn't smell bad and other wild animals wouldn't get their noses filled with quills. Also, the needle sharp, toothpick sized objects wouldn't be scattered around.

My family didn't realize porcupines caused so much damage to Ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir trees. They made me promise to show them how the animal chewed the bark from a tree top and how come it caused the tree to either die or become deformed.

The Forest Service encouraged us to kill every one we saw. In fact, there was a contest going on right then. The man who killed the most porcupines on the district during the summer got a whole carton of 22 shells.

At that time, the Forest Service figured that one porcupine could kill or ruin at least $3,500.00 worth of timber in its lifetime. The fire guards were paid mileage to encourage hunting the animal at night. There was many a night we saw and killed as many as six porcupines. In fact, I won the prize the first year for killing the most animals.

With the dead porcupine buried we climbed back in the car and drove slowly toward Lodgepole. When we arrived, Tricia and Janna were sound asleep; but Don was wide awake and wanted to hunt some more.

The next day there were lots of things to catch up on. It was a never ending job patching up rigging, fixing fence and other repair jobs. My kids were always somewhere nearby, exploring the wonders of the wild within hearing distance of the house. The day was passing by and it looked like I wouldn't even get to try my luck at chasing smoke. Darkness finally settled in, and Doug hadn't gone past the station yet. We knew he would stop for a moment before going on

to Butte Falls.

Doug made the trip to Bessie Rock but not without mishap. That evening the cattle guard rattled as Doug's pickup crossed it. We greeted him at the gate. He climbed out, hobbled over to the fence and used it to hold himself up. Surely Sundee must have bucked him off, or else Austin had stampeded and run over him, the way he acted.

Mule trouble turned out to be the answer. Doug was pulling the lash rope tight on Dillon. The Bessie Rock lookout boy was standing nearby and sneezed. Austin spooked and jumped sideways sandwiching Doug between the two mules. It knocked the wind out of him and he skinned his elbow. By the end of the day, Doug figured he might have to have some repair work done on his ribs. Some hot coffee and a bite to eat didn't seem to help much, but at least he could make it home. Working with a string of pack mules was always full of surprises, but it was ten times better working with a mule than it was working with a motorized wheelbarrow.

The evenings around Lodgepole were peaceful and quiet. Sundee would run the mules away from the feed rack now and then, but this was part of the environment we lived in. Eight o'clock in the evening was sign-off time for the four lookouts and three guard stations on the district. I turned my radio on and stood out by the fence to listen and maybe get in on the gossip. At evening sign-off time Doug took grocery orders from the remote lookouts. It was one of these evenings that Devil's Peak turned in his order, which meant a trip the next day. His list included a mattress for his bed. The mice had borrowed too much of the stuffing from the old one, and it was getting a little bit too thin for a comfortable nights sleep.

Doug was on hand bright and early next morning. Breakfast was ready when he got there. By the looks of his pickup truck, there was about two mule loads to go in. It seemed that no matter how early Doug arrived at Lodgepole to make a trip with me, we always got a late start up the trail. It was 11:00 a.m. by the time we climbed in our saddles and headed toward Devil's Peak. We put the mattress on Dillon. Doug led the mules and I followed behind to speed things up. We had to ride about four miles on a dirt road before we came to the trailhead. Dillon stopped and laid down at the end of the bridge at the South Fork of Rogue River. He did it so quick, it looked like he stumbled and fell. Doug knew how to get him going again. We reached the trail, passed through Black Bear Forest Camp at Nichols Creek and headed uphill.

When we pulled up to give the stock a rest, Dillon laid down again, this time loosening the pack and tearing a hole in the mattress. We repacked completely and looked for something that might be rubbing him. We rode past King Spruce Junction and on to the four-mile sign. All at once Dillon jumped from the trail and ran under some low jagged limbs and tried to rub off his load. Every time, Tom took advantage of the hold-ups and feasted on huckleberry brush. Dillon really did things up right this time. He tore several three-cornered holes in the mattress, broke a breeching strap and stirred up a yellow jacket nest.

The yellow jackets upset things in grand style. Tom headed back down the trail going full speed with a huckleberry bush hanging from his teeth. His tail was going round and round like an airplane propeller. Dillon didn't do too bad about moving out either. The mattress fell off along with a couple of other

articles, and we had a tough time staying in our saddles. Trouble like this always made our work interesting because there were never any two minutes alike. Anything might happen.

About an hour later, we continued on toward Devil's Peak with a badly damaged mattress and several broken eggs. At Frog Lake, we let the stock drink. At Alta Lake Junction we turned to the right past Heather Ponds and began the steep climb to the ridge between Lucifer Mountain and Devil's Peak. The trail follows east along the ridge in a steady climb, going back and forth on sharp switchbacks.

The roof of the lookout house came into view first, and then the building began to take shape. Finally we were at the weatherbeaten hitching rail, its middle bowed by the heavy burden of winter snow and ice. A young college student, Neil Richardson, was stationed there. He was happy to see us, knowing there would be letters from home, fresh food and a good mattress. Doug didn't comment too much about the condition of the mattress. Neil acted like he didn't believe what he saw.

Devil's Peak Lookout

Below us, mountain hemlock and noble fir grew in large areas, in small patches and clumps everywhere. The area around the south end of Seven Lakes Basin is a series of sharp peaks, cliffs and steep rock slides. Each peak has a name. West of us I could see Venus, Jupiter and Lucifer, three peaks close together. Shale Butte and Luther Mountain were farther apart, southwest of Devil's Peak and connected to it by a long saddle. Farther east is Lee Peak, crowned by a tall rock that looks like a monument. Klamath Point and Cherry Peak obscured the view northeast and southeast of the lookout.

The man who spent the summer living on Devil's Peak kept a constant watch for forest fires. He was responsible for about 160,000 acres. Within these acres were the beautiful Sky Lakes Group and Blue Canyon full of lakes

and mountain streams. North from Devil's Peak Lookout you look down on several of the lakes in Seven Lakes Basin. The long narrow dimple in the top of Violet Hill is Alta Lake.

In the distance, the deep blue Middle Fork Canyon headed a little northwest then turned west and disappeared in the distance. Lone Wolf Peak stands by itself; but Ruth, Ethel and Maude Mountains are side by side. There are flat topped mountains too; and in the far distance, the rim of Crater Lake looks jagged and mysterious. At one time, it was one of the highest mountains in the Cascade Range. On a clear day, the lookout on Devil's Peak can see for a hundred miles or more in most any direction. He could spot a fire up to fifteen miles away and accurately pinpoint its location on a map. A smoke-chaser would have no more trouble finding a fire location on the map than he would locating any known place.

I know that if people who love to hike or ride were to wander up a trail that leads to the wilderness areas available, they would see country so beautiful that they wouldn't believe it. One thing people fear is wild animals, but there is no danger in the hills, considering everything they might encounter. Their greatest danger is driving the highways and roads before they arrive at the trailhead. Wild animals such as bears, coyote, cougars and other animals are just as frightened of you as you are of them. Don't try and bother them. Stand still and they will run away. Never fool around with a sick or injured animal.

During my years as a mule skinner and smoke-chaser, I spent many a night in the wilderness, sleeping on the ground. There were lots of strange noises but nothing ever bothered me except one time when a porcupine walked across my chest.

Doug and I packed up and left the lookout around 5:00 p.m. It was thirteen miles to Lodgepole. At two and a half miles an hour, supper would be late. My family would wonder what had happened.

We did a lot of talking as we rode toward home. Doug told me a lot of things I should remember while fighting fire. Some of the problems he mentioned didn't sound too good; but like he said, we hired out to be tough and tough it was. We covered the thirteen miles fairly fast; but nonetheless, it was way after dark when we fed and watered the horses and mules. Doug didn't stay for supper. He went straight to his home and family at Butte Falls Ranger Station.

CHAPTER 5

THE GREAT SKYLINE TRAIL

The following weekend Doug asked me to be on fire standby. Smoke-chasers didn't get any money for it; but nonetheless, we had to do it. It caused me to be mighty nervous just waiting for the phone to ring, or waiting for something to happen . I went to the barn and scattered out a bunch of pack saddles and checked them over for broken parts. It was a simple task to add a flank cinch to two of the pack saddles. The extra cinch helped to keep the load on and it was a lot easier on the mule.

Doug and I had made tentative plans to go on a three-day pack trip on the Skyline Trail. The purpose was to help me learn the country and to see how much the high mountain trails were used. The only thing that would prevent us from going was a fire. Doug gave me a ring on the phone Sunday afternoon and confirmed our pack trip.

To speed things up, it helped a lot by my going down to the barn and rounding up a few items. We had to take along an axe, shovel, a canvas bucket, flashlight and such things we might forget in the excitement of the morning we departed. There must have been a dozen trips made from the house to the barn with my three shadows, Don, Tricia and Janna walking by me, all jabbering at once.

All my life I had dreamed about taking a trip on the Skyline Trail, but my kind of work wouldn't allow me any free time to go. It sounded to me like a real fun trip. We spread out my district map to trace out the route we would take with a red felt pen. A red circle at Lodgepole marked our starting point. The red ink showed up well on the white paper as I traced over the road toward the Lower South Fork Campground on the Rogue River; then to Parker Meadows Road, where the Seven Lakes Trail starts. My red line went through Black Bear Forest Camp and up the mountain toward King Spruce Junction. A red dot marked Frog Lake, which indicated a rest stop. At Alta Lake Junction, we made a dotted line out to Alta Lake. The dots indicated a side trip. We would spend our first night at Grass Lake . Another red circle marked the site.

The three children were watching with interest. When my route of travel was traced out, Don was following over the red line with his finger, showing his mother where Dad would be and when. The three observers were accurate and pronounced the names of the places well. Don pointed to the spot where we would hit the Skyline Trail. There was some argument between the three children about my camping at Ranger Springs, but finally Tricia won out by thumping a chubby little finger on McKie Camp. We put a dotted line from McKie to Solace Cow Camp, just two miles south. Don explained that Doug and Dad didn't really know where our third night would be spent, but maybe at Imnaha Guard Station.

The Skyline Trail is for recreation use. It extends from the Canadian line

to the border of Old Mexico. We would be on about ten miles of it. Our total trip would cover eighty some odd miles counting side trips.

For a wonder, we got an early start and everything looked like it might be an enjoyable trip; but something was bound to happen before we saw Lodgepole again. As usual, Doug led the three mules while I followed behind. If we stirred up any yellow jackets, it was always the tail mule on the string that got hit with most of the stinging bees. That put me in a bad spot.

On a sunny hillside just below King Spruce Junction, Doug hollered "Yellow jackets!" Tom Mule was starting to put on quite a show. Some little yellow bees hit Dillon in a vital spot. It's amazing what all can happen in a short time. Austin almost turned around in his pack saddle when the bees hit him. Then came my turn. Being so busy watching all the commotion up ahead, before I knew it my saddle horse got stung. He started to run and buck and I didn't discourage it a bit. There must have been about 20,000 bees for each of us and all the gyrations made it look like they were evenly divided among us. Sundee was all humped up with her head down. Doug sat on top paying strict attention to the business at hand, like hanging on for dear life. Tom lost all of his top pack on the first kick and up through the timber he went, scattering the rest of the load. Dillon stood on his front legs and kicked so hard and fast that he almost turned upside down. The load I had lashed to him didn't hold so good either. Austin lost his top pack near the nest;and just before the bees hit my horse, you could see yellow jackets seeping out from under the pack cover. We rode like the wind for a ways for two reasons. One was to stay out of Austin's way and the other was to get away from the stinging bees.

One thing for sure, if we ran into very many yellow jacket nests, we might be a month making our three-day trip. Anyhow, the only things that happened were a run-away and a few busted eggs. A package of cookies turned to crumbs when Tom bumped a tree as he bolted away. The yellow jackets finally settled down enough to pull our supplies away from the nest and get them reloaded. We lost nearly two hours in the process.

About a mile above King Spruce Junction, Austin passed near another bees nest. At first it looked like he was standing on one spot,running. Then he started to kick and his tail was switching around like an airplane propellor. Of course all his excitement caused another short run-away. It turned out that instead of it being another nest of bees, it was a live one he had picked up at the last nest. It crawled around stinging as it went; and when it finally made it to the mule, it must have really done a good job. Austin managed to kick the bee loose because everything seemed to be okay when we stopped running. Every time we had a run-away, something came loose or fell off. This time we got repacked in less than an hour.

At Frog Lake we took a short rest to let the horses and mules get a drink. Between here and the summit the mules were jumpy. The slightest movement by the trail would spook one. There is a place along the trail above Frog Lake near a small ledge of shale rock where ruffled grouse like to stay. I can't think of anything that spooks a lead horse worse than a big grouse taking flight from directly under his nose.

We left the Seven Lakes Trail and followed a ridge due north. Through the trees, we could see a glimmer of sunshine on the water. A moment later, our

horses and mules were walking along the edge of Alta Lake. The lake is quite long with a narrow center. It reminds me of a bow tie. The water is deep and full of trout. For three-quarters of a mile we rode along the waters edge. At the north end, there is a viewpoint called Violet Hill. It was at this spot that we saw two of the largest mule deer I have ever seen.

Alta Lake

We left Alta Lake and dropped down into the Basin. There were lots of meadows and small snow-water ponds and heather grew thick everywhere. We rode past South Lake, which was too shallow for fish, but a beautiful lake to swim in or camp by. At its north edge was a cabin used by men who run the snow surveys in the high country. At Cliff Lake, which is a deep blue body of water,situated at the foot of a cliff, there are two campgrounds — one on either side of the lake.

Grass Lake is flanked by a large meadow of about twenty acres. At the eastern edge of the meadow was a three-sided shelter located near a cold spring. The shelter faced the mountainside, which acted as a wind break. A large fireplace stood directly in the open front and was used for heat as well as a cooking fire. We unpacked, unsaddled and took the horses and mules out to grass. We drove two stakes in the ground about two hundred feet apart. A sixty foot rope was anchored to each stake and the other end was tied to one front foot of each saddle horse. We put a twenty-foot rope on the front foot of each mule and turned them loose. They wouldn't leave camp.

I cut an armload of wood and started a fire. Doug would cook our supper. The sun was getting low and the cool night air caused me to decide our woodpile was still a little shy. Our campfire supper tasted good. We had fried potatoes and onions, steak, and string beans, and fruit for dessert. After putting all that under my belt, it made me feel lazy and sleepy. We walked out to the meadow to make sure the stock were okay. We came back and put plenty of

wood on the fire and stretched out on our bedrolls to relax. I dug around in my saddle bags and brought out my harmonica and played a few tunes. Doug even tried to sing some. It wasn't too long before sleep got the best of us and we turned in.

The night air was cold and the mosquitoes were bad in the warm air of the shelter. There was a four foot square of light canvas which I used to pull down over my face to keep them off. I laid the canvas down and put my pillow on one end of it.. When I got tucked in, it was easy to pull the loose end over my head and down as far as it would go. There were enough wrinkles in it so plenty of air could get through for me to breathe, but the mosquitoes couldn't bite me. Talk about solid comfort. That was it.

About midnight my dog woke me up. He growled at something, which really wasn't unusual. It seemed as though he was walking around. In fact, he walked up across my legs, over my chest and stopped near my head. If I hadn't been so comfortable, I might have reached out and petted him. But the mosquitoes were too bad.

A moment later, my dog seemed to be climbing the wall and I knew it wasn't him. I started to roll very slowly in the opposite direction from the sound until I was a safe distance away from the wall. Doug woke up and asked what was going on. He turned a flashlight toward the scratching sound. Clinging to the comer post of the shelter was a big porcupine. Moments before, his wicked quills had been less than six inches from my face! Two shots from my pistol solved our problem as Doug held a flashlight for me.

We made short work of him. Doug tossed the body out by a tree and we went back to bed. We would bury the dead animal before we pulled out the next day. For the rest of the night, my little dog kept running deer away from our pack saddles and riding gear. Deer like the salty taste of cinches and latigos.

One of the saddle horses nickered and a mule brayed and woke me up. It wasn't quite daylight, so I ignored the idea of getting up and snuggled a little deeper in my bed. Soon there wasn't any choice but to roll out and get moving. It was right down chilly, and after a couple of tries, I got a good fire going and the coffee pot on. Doug was stirring around in the shelter and mumbling something about how short the nights were getting and that he just got to sleep when all the noise I had made chopping wood and building a fire had woke him up.

Doug wasn't too bad a cook, but he used a little too much grease most of the time. I boiled my eggs for breakfast, while Doug was getting things packed up. Then I got the horses and mules together at the shelter and we loaded up and headed up the trail.

We left Grass Lake about 8:00 a.m. and took a spur to the Skyline Trail. About two miles north of Seven Lakes Basin we crossed a small stream called Honeymoon Creek. Above the trail was a long stringer meadow with lots of tall grass. Honeymoon Creek ran right down the center like a snake. Each turn in the creek almost touched another as it twisted its way along its course. Hundreds of hikers and horseback riders travel the trail every year. When there are a lot of horses and mules in Seven Lakes Basin, this is a wonderful place to camp. The Skyline Trail stays close to the higher ridges along the Cascade Range. A variety of wild animals can be seen here, such as blacktail deer and

mule deer, elk, black bear and smaller animals like martin and fisher.

The beautiful little mountain stream got its name from a thoughtful member of a trail crew many years ago. His name was Marshel Sweet. He and his partner had worked the Skyline Trail south from Crater Lake National Park. They reached the little meadow just before dark. It was such a nice quiet place to spend the night.

The next morning Marshel looked things over and told his partner that the place should have a name. I think it should be called "Honeymoon Creek" because it would be so nice to spend my honeymoon here when I get married. So he split out a flat piece of wood and smoothed off one side. He carved in the words "Honeymoon Creek" and nailed it to a tree where the creek crossed the trail.

The name was appropriate because to this day the beautiful, high mountain meadow with the pure, cold water stream running through it is known by everyone as "Honeymoon Creek."

Around noontime we stopped for a short rest and climbed to the top of a little butte to try our radio. We checked in with the lookout on Devil's Peak. Everything was okay so we got on our horses and continued on. Soon we come to an area called the Oregon Desert. It covers three or four hundred acres and is mostly flat with lodgepole pine growing everywhere. There is very little vegetation under the trees. From Honeymoon Creek to Stewart Falls is about thirteen miles with no chance to get a drink of water in between.

About halfway across the Oregon Desert, we come to a trail junction. We left the Skyline Trail and rode down to a place called McKie Camp, about three miles below us, dropping several hundred feet in elevation. McKie Cow Camp has a lush meadow with a good sized stream of water running through it. I noticed several legal-sized mountain trout in the deep pools as we rode along the stream bank. We crossed at a shallow place and rode over to the shelter in the edge of the timber.

Our tasks were fairly routine once we got to a campsite. We always took care of our horses and mules first. We gathered wood, started a fire, cooked supper and enjoyed life immensely. It was always interesting to me to go over some of the problems that occurred during the days ride. We hadn't done too badly today. Tom slipped his pack a couple of times coming downhill to McKie because he swung his load back and forth from side to side like a horse. Dillon carried his load like a jackass, just as even and steady as could be. As for Austin, he seemed to use both methods. If it looked like there might be a chance to lose everything, he made the best of it and usually caused a full-fledged stampede in the process. If his load happened to be the one that might hurt him, should it fall off, he walked just as steady as Dillon did.

Each mule had a different personality. Dillon was sophisticated, to say the least. He stood straight, never resting on first one foot then another. When he was grazing, he always cropped a mouthful of grass and raised his head up to eat it, then bent down for another mouthful. When he got a drink of water, he found the clearest spot. If the water was murky, he would move his upper lip back and forth to clear the surface and sip the water without a sound .

When Dillon saw you coming toward him, he held his head high, with both long ears pointed straight toward you to see what you were carrying, if

anything. If he saw a bucket in your hand, it meant oats about nine times out of ten. If he saw a rope, it meant something else. As you walked up to him and figured he was going to be easy to catch, he would wheel and kick. In a split second, where the halter had been there were two mules hind feet. On the trail Dillon stayed close behind even when he wasn't being led. He would always turn crossways of a hill to rest. If his load hurt him in any way, he would forsake all dignity and do his best to get rid of his miserable pack by bucking, or rubbing against something, or laying down and frantically trying to roll.

There were other interesting things about Dillon. Once he got himself all tangled up in a loosely rolled piece of page wire, trying to get at the tall grass that had grown up through the coils. He tried to get loose but knew he would only hurt himself. I know he was hung up for at least half a day before he was noticed . I got some wire cutters and cut one foot loose at a time. He stood still and straight. I got out of his way, thinking he might flounder around; but he very cautiously lifted one foot up at a time, stepped free of his trap and ran as hard as he could toward the water trough.

Tom Mule didn't like anyone fooling around with his ears, and a strange noise really put him on the alert. He loved to be curried and brushed and always stood still when I loaded his pack on. As for eating, that was something else. He acted like a woman trying to stay on a diet, but who just couldn't stand the sight of food. He tried to eat it all up to get it out of sight. He loved to pull huckleberry brush up by the roots and keep chomping until it was gone. He acted like the only reason we ever traveled the trails was so he could explore new areas to sample green food. When he ate oats it sounded like a kid eating an ice cream cone. Tom was my favorite mule. He put up with about anything I wanted to do and seemed to tolerate my short comings.

Austin had to be seen to be appreciated. He seemed to have eyes in the back of his head, and was jumpy as a cat. If I sneezed unexpectedly, he would jump. He wouldn't eat when anyone was around unless he had a halter on and was tied to the feed rack. He had absolutely no manners at all. When he grazed in a mountain meadow, he reminded me of a lawn mower, his mouth working open and shut as he moved around spraddle-legged. His head swung slowly from side to side as he swallowed grass.

He was never mindful of the other stock, either eating or drinking. He would run full speed to a lake's edge and wouldn't stop until he was belly deep in water. He would shove his nose into the water and flop his upper and lower lips up and down and shake his nose around. He would take a mouthful of water and seemed to do about everything but gargle. Then with a lot of slurping and lip popping, he would tank up. As for oats, he inhaled them. When he was eating oats, there would be a stream of oats coming from each corner of his mouth, unless he was tired, then he took dainty little bites and would chew and chew. When he was working under a pack, the old boy would just about walk a log for me if I let him alone. He was certainly a one-man mule.

Doug and I spent the evening laughing and talking about those long-eared Government mules. We rested good that night and woke up at daylight feeling refreshed. Tom brayed at me when I showed up at the meadow. His bray sounded like air escaping under heavy pressure from a large hole in a truck tire. I led the saddle horses back to the shelter and the mules followed along. While

Doug put the finishing touches on our breakfast, each animal enjoyed a ration of oats.

About an hour later, we were on our way headed out on the Tom and Jerry Trail. The country we rode through was some of the best deer and elk hunting country around. Several fresh elk tracks were going both ways in the trail and deer tracks were plentiful. We crossed a little flat and toward the center was a place covered with loose dirt, where no grass grew. I saw two sets of bear tracks there. It looked like a mother bear and her cub.

About 1:00 we topped out on a little rise where we could spot the Bessie Rock Lookout. It was a good place to take a break, eat our lunch and check in on the radio to let the office know where we were. As we ate lunch, Doug pointed out Cinnamon Peak, Union Peak and Tom and Jerry Mountains. This was country I needed to know well in case I had to fight fires here someday.

We had finished lunch and were all set to move out when we checked in on the radio. Headquarters was glad to hear from us. They had just got word that the man on Bessie Rock had had an appendicitis attack. Bessie Rock Lookout wasn't exactly a good place to get sick. It was three and a half miles from the lookout by trail to where an old rough road took off down the mountain toward civilization. We were closer to the lookout than anyone else. Somehow we had to accomplish a rescue and do it quick. From where we were it was about four miles — airline — to the lookout; but by trail eight miles, and half of that was uphill.

Doug didn't request any additional help because just two weeks before, the previous lookout on Bessie Rock had called in to report that he was awful sick. After questioning him, Doug figured he had appendicitis and rounded up a crew of nine men to go in and pack him out. After great effort, they got the boy off the lookout, down over a long, rough, rock slide and nearly to the end of the trail. Then, just before they reached the ambulance, the man in the lead discovered a porcupine coming up the trail. It would take only a moment to kill the tree-chewing animal. So he picked up a pine limb and went after it.

Killing a porcupine is sometimes easier said than done. Two men who had been helping on the stretcher gave chase. Then more of the men entered in to help with the kill. The excitement was too much for the boy who was supposed to have appendicitis. First he sat up, then, turned so that his feet were resting on the ground. At that moment the porcupine made one last run and came toward the stretcher. The boy jumped up, picked up a large rock and slammed it down on the animal. He grabbed another and another and threw them. After a moment the rescuers realized something was wrong and began to question the sick boy. He realized he had goofed and admitted he was playing sick so he could get away from the lookout. By then it was around midnight. From that moment on, he was the most unpopular boy in the country.

Doug and I headed toward Bessie Rock Lookout to have a look at the second boy who claimed he was sick. Doug was determined to make sure he was really sick before we packed him out. It took us about three hours to reach the lookout. I stayed with the stock while Doug climbed the 96 foot ladder to the top of Bessie Rock and on up a few more steps to the door of the lookout house.

The sight Doug saw spurred him to action. There lay one man who wasn't putting on. He was bad sick. Doug got a call through on the radio requesting help and made sure an ambulance would be waiting at the end of the trail. I wouldn't get to help rescue the sick boy because my hands were full with three mules and two horses. Doug stayed on the lookout, and I took the stock and headed for Bessie Creek Shelter about three miles away.

There was a logger and his crew of seven men working near the trails end. They were contacted and the logger shut down his operation and headed in. Being a tough bunch of fellows, they made it to the lookout much sooner than we expected. It was a big job getting down off the lookout with a man so sick he could barely keep from passing out, but they made it. Everything clicked along. Schedules were met and the boy survived his operation. His appendix had burst before he got to the hospital. Although he couldn't work as a lookout anymore that season, he did man the Pelican Butte Lookout the next year. Pelican Butte, located just west of Upper Klamath Lake, was on the Klamath District.

At Bessie Creek Shelter there was a large open meadow where the stock would have plenty of feed. Bessie Creek runs right by the end of the shelter. Austin shook himself violently the moment I pulled his pack saddle off. Down at the creek, he made the usual big fuss and was anxious to get where the tallest grass was and start eating. I kept Austin tied up, using a 40 foot rope with one end tied to his left front foot and the other to a strong stake driven in the ground. The two horses were tied up the same way. Tom and Dillon roamed loose. I rounded up a lot of wood and built a good campfire. There was a coffee pot and two frying pans hanging from a rafter in the shelter. I really enjoyed the evening with the smell of coffee and food cooking. Even old Tom liked it because he came in close and kept staring at me and the fire. I gave him all the leftovers, which he ate in a very unmannerly way.

It beats all how some men get all the breaks,and right now I seemed to be among the fortunate . I had always dreamed about doing things like this; having a saddle horse, a string of pack mules and my own camp.

The night passed quickly, and daylight was greeted by loud braying from Austin. I rolled out, stirred up the fire and called Doug on the radio. During the night a lightning storm passed over and touched off a couple of fires. Doug thought he saw smoke coming up about a mile east of the shelter. I put my saddle on Sundee and went looking for fire. I decided to carry an axe and shovel up the trail about a mile and leave them near a big tree, then ride out through the timber toward where the fire should be. I carried a compass and signal mirror with me always.

Sundee carried me for an hour but I couldn't see nor smell any smoke. We climbed to an opening and called Doug on the radio, then flashed him with my mirror. According to him the fire was right below me. There was an opening full of heavy hazelnut brush. Every leaf was full of water The sun covered about half the opening. As I sat there on Sundee watching and trying to spot the smoke, a cloud of vapor lifted from the wet brush patch. Doug called me and said another puff of smoke had come up. We had made a discovery. The warm sunshine was drying out the wet brush. The warmth caused steam to rise and it would come up from the brush in puffs. We often refer to situations like this

as "false smoke" because they look so much like smoke to a lookout.

After satisfying Doug there was no fire, I rode back to the shelter, packed up and rode up to Bessie Rock. Doug was ready to go home. We hit the trail for Imnaha five miles south of Bessie Shelter. We crossed Bessie Creek and rode down the trail past Geyser Springs on the breaks of the Middle Fork of Rogue River. There are several switchbacks down the mountain to the river. We had to look for a good crossing. Each year the crossing was different and this year it was deep enough to cause Dillon to swim a short distance, since he was the shortest mule. Austin crossed in his usual fashion — long, splashing jumps getting everyone else all wet in the process. We reached Imnaha in good time and decided to ride the stock through to Lodgepole, which would save me a ride the next day. We forded two large creeks and the South Fork of Rogue River.

Lodgepole looked mighty good to me. After the stock was fed and sore spots doctored, Doug went on to Butte Falls and I rested up at Lodgepole. My wife and kids wanted to hear all about my pack trip. They hung on every word. The kids loved the stories of things that happened after every pack trip. By now I felt like a real mule skinner should.

CHAPTER 6

FALSE SMOKE IN MERLE BURN

For the next day or so, I worked at jobs around Lodgepole and was available for smoke-chasing. My 1937 Chevrolet Coupe ran like a top. It would go places no other two-wheel-drive rig would travel, My fire pack was kept in the trunk wrapped in a tarp so it would stay clean. Everything had to be ready to go because after a fire report was received and all the information needed to locate a fire was gotten, I had just two minutes to get going.

There was another complete fire pack down at the saddle room so if a pack mule or saddle horse was the transportation there would be no time lost in getting the pack from the car. If the dispatcher had an idea the stock would be needed on a fire, he would let me know ahead of time. I would saddle my horse and one mule because after the fire report was copied, they allowed only 15 minutes to get going. During the 15 minutes, the stock had to be saddled and packed ready to go. At night, the Forest Service allowed us 20 minutes for get-away time using pack and saddle stock.I built a special feed rack in the barnyard with a hitching rail around the top to tie the stock to. If they were not used, it only took a moment to unsaddle them and turn them loose.

My time out for rest was short. The Weather Bureau predicted a 40% chance of lightning for today and an 80% chance for tomorrow. Lightning is the greatest kindler of forest fires in the western states. The 40% and 80% predictions were made from past experience and present conditions and generally held true. There would be extra men held on emergency fire standby. All were specially trained firefighters like myself. Immediate aggressive action kept most all fires small and the suppression costs were low. If a fire got away, it would likely cost many thousands of dollars to die it out.

By 9:00 p.m. that first day, we all began to rest easy. The 40% chance of a lightning storm materialized okay, but it stayed on the east side of the Cascade Divide. The Klamath District got a few strikes and a fire or two. We were safe for now. The best thing to do was to get plenty of rest and prepare for tomorrow.

The night was cool. I got a good nights sleep and was up at daylight to feed my mules and horses. Soon after breakfast, Doug called me on the telephone. He said the Weather Bureau was going to stick to the 80% prediction for lightning. In fact, the thunderheads were starting to build around Mount Shasta and also southwest of the Rogue River Forest, in California. Our chances for getting to chase smoke today looked good. I was ready to go.

Around 2:00 p.m. we heard the first rumble of thunder. I called Rustler Peak Lookout to see what was happening. The first strikes on the forest were spotted from Robinson Butte on the Ashland District. In less than an hour all the lookouts south of Mount McLoughlin signed off for the duration of the storm. By 3:30 p.m. all 80% of the predicted storm followed the Cascade

Divide north and spread out about thirty miles wide. We were getting a real pounding.

At Lodgepole we closed all the windows and doors because lightning follows air currents. My children huddled on a thick springless mattress in the center of the livingroom floor. I unhooked the telephone and waited for the storm to pass over. At 4:15 in the afternoon, Rustler Peak spotted a fire. It was putting up lots of smoke about 280° and five miles from the lookout.

Doug called and told me to go to the fire and be prepared to spend the night. I would make the initial attack alone and a two man crew would be along shortly. It was my fire. My first real fire!

My fire report blanks were always handy by the phone. I copied every word and read them back to make sure there was no mistake. The firemans map was there on the phone table and with a straightedge ruler, I traced along a 280° line from the lookout, five miles to where I would find the fire. It plotted out at the lower edge of Merle burn, an area which had burned over about fifty years ago. It was now grown up with thick tall brush.

The starter of my smoke-chaser car responded immediately. It felt good to be heading toward the unknown. Could I find the fire? If I did, could I put it out? Time would tell. My wife and kids watched from the yard as I drove up the road and crossed the cattleguard. They would be waiting when I returned in a day or so.

My car ran good as it rolled down the Lodgepole road toward Cur Creek. The way my map read, I would drive up the Cur Creek Road about two miles and at some point along the way Rustler Peak Lookout would come into view and I would get on their line-of-sight to the fire. According to my speedometer, it was about right. At two and one eighth miles, Rustler Peak Lookout was in plain sight and I took my compass to check the azimuth of 280°. I pointed my compass toward the lookout.

In order to determine my line of sight, I had to get a back shot reading. There are 360° on the compass dial since it is a complete circle. With pad and pencil, I subtracted 280° from 360°. The answer was 80° so I set my compass on 80° and looked toward the lookout. From where I stood, it was about 2° off the line-of-sight. By walking down the road 100 yards, my compass read 80°, looking right at the tower four miles away. I turned the dial until it read 280° and lined up the north end of the needle. My line-of-sight was pointed in the direction of the fire.

The Merle Burn covered several hundred acres. Many species of brush now covered what had once been a dense stand of timber, and it grew thick and tall. I was on the south edge of the Burn about two hundred yards from tall timber. My teacher at Fire School had been Bob Webb, who had a lot of first hand experience while he ran the Fire Control job on the Applegate District. He taught me how to offset from my line-of-sight to get around impassable objects. Here was a chance to try out what he taught me.

I took a right angle shot at a big Douglas fir tree at the edge of the timber, then counted my paces until I reached the tree; and then turned my compass so it would read a 280°course. The trick was to count my paces until I had walked for one mile. One pace is two normal steps. Ten paces for me equal one chain, and eighty chains equal one mile. At the end of the mile run, I turned

at right angles again and got back to my original line-of-sight from the lookout. I should be near the fire the lookout had spotted. I called Rustler Peak to tell him I had reached the spot where he had reported the fire, but there was nothing. His instructions were to keep looking.

Darkness was closing in. It was time to get the flashlight from my fire pack and fasten it to my hard hat. The flashlight was designed especially for a smoke-chaser. There was a red tin box that held four flashlight batteries, two on each side. On the lid there was a two-way switch. By pushing the switch to the left, the light used electricity from only two batteries. When the light got dim, the switch was pushed to the other side and fresh batteries took over. The battery box had a clip which hooked over my belt. From the lid, there extended a four foot cord with the headlamp attached to the end. The cord ran up under my coat and came out at the collar so it wouldn't hook up on brush and limbs. The headlamp had an elastic band to hold it on my tin safety hat. My light checked out okay.

I crossed a small creek full of weeds and high ferns. Logs and other debris made traveling difficult. In a small opening, I flashed my light on the compass to get my bearings. Just as I got a reading, my light flickered out. I changed batteries, but the light wouldn't work. In fire school the instructor had taught us what to do if this should happen. A new bulb didn't change a thing. The unexpected always happens. My light wouldn't work, I couldn't find the fire and I was in strange country – dark, black country. I called in and explained my predicament. The dispatcher suggested to try and make it back to the road.

The old Merle Burn fire had burned mighty hot, consuming everything in its path except some of the largest trees. The terrain is full of humps and little dips caused by erosion and land slippage. When the burned and charred giants fell to the ground, in many cases they hit a hump or dip and broke in two. As the brush and other ground vegetation grew, it covered the lower ends of the snags; but the upper ends stuck up above the brush. This was the mess I had to get myself out of in the dark. The storm had brought a heavy shower with it, and walking through the thick brush was like walking through a sprinkler. My matches got wet; but even if they had been dry, I couldn't have lit a fire. Everything was too wet. Hard telling how many times I fell down or how many holes I fell into.

The voices over my radio sounded like beautiful music. It was very lonely. I heard noises that sounded like anything from elephants on down. Once there was a shuffling, dragging sound right at my feet. I had almost stumbled over a porcupine. Another time the brush popped and snapped, then a scratching sound seemed to be going straight up – probably was a bobcat or bear scampering up a tree. Deer stampeded away from me quite often. From Rustler Peak, Mrs. Gear's voice was very comforting as I listened to her instructions on my radio. Mr. Gear was out on the cat-walk of the lookout flashing a heavy duty flashlight. The light could be seen three different times.

I was carrying a fifty pound fire pack and a fifteen pound radio. As I pussy-footed along with no light, I started up the broad surface of one of the big snags. There was a feeling of coming out into a clearing as I climbed up the gentle slope of the burned down tree. The brush thinned out, and then I came to the broken off end of the log. That last step off the end was the shocker. When

I landed in a heap on the wet ground below, it took me a moment to figure out what had happened. Ten or maybe twelve feet above me was a round hole in the brush where I passed through. This happened to me two different times. I wasn't hurt, just mad and wet and worn out.

After about five hours of staggering and stumbling along, I got tangled up in some brush that seemed to move along with me. Once more I fell to the ground. Each time I went down, I just laid there and rested, bemoaning my luck for ever hiring out as a smoke-chaser. As I lay there, something seemed different about the surroundings. There seemed to be an opening next to me. I got up and took a few steps. Sure enough, it was the Cur Creek Road. The brush that had tripped me was brush that the road crew had cut off and tossed back out of the way. What a feeling! Solid ground and no brush. The roadway was a dim shape ahead of me. My car should be uphill someplace. About twenty minutes later I spotted a black object up ahead, and in a moment my car took shape. I turned on the lights and checked my watch. It was twenty minutes to midnight.

I drove home, thankful I wasn't hurt. Hot coffee and dry clothes put me back in good shape again. As for the fire, it never did show up. The wet lightning storm had put it out soon after the lookout spotted the smoke. Maybe it was a lucky break at that. Later Doug told me he had rounded up a ten-man crew to come to my rescue. They had been standing by for two hours. Every lookout and smoke-chaser in the country was listening in on radios and telephones, including my wife and kids.

Next morning I took my fire pack apart and cleaned it up and believe me, a new flashlight was added. A fire pack weighs about forty-five pounds and contains tools enough for one man to guide himself to a fire and suppress it. The components are a pulaski (a hoe on one side and axe on the other) for digging and chopping, a two-piece shovel with a sharp edge and a ten inch file for keeping the hand tools sharp. An experienced smoke-chaser could chop down a tree or snag of thirty-two inch diameter by himself. Also, in the pack were a compass, maps, writing pad and pencil, protractor, a one gallon canteen filled with water and a flashlight with extra batteries. There was also enough food for three meals for one man.

A five gallon rubber water bag with a spray nozzle has been added to the pack in recent years. On top was a water proof box filled with matches.

To my pack there was added a two foot square of aluminum foil, a bar of soap, a wash rag and a pair of heavy socks. To spend several days on a fire in the back country these extra socks would save my feet. A man must depend on his feet to get him to the fire, suppress and mop it up and then walk out. The aluminum foil was spread out and cupped. The pork and beans or hamburger patties or stew was then put on the foil. The corners were pulled together and twisted, making an almost air-tight food container. This was placed in the edge of a fire, and in about five minutes the food was hot and ready to eat.

In the afternoon, Rustler Peak spotted another smoke. Bessie Rock got a cross shot on the fire, which made it easy to pinpoint on a map. The fire was a mile and a half up the Seven Lakes Trail on Fry Creek. The timber in this area was tall with lots of dead and dry wood on the ground. Doug dispatched a four-

man crew from Butte Falls. He wouldn't let me go.

The men walked up the trail until they could see the smoke in the vicinity of Fry Creek. One of the men was the fireboss. Upon arrival, he picked out a safe place to put the fire packs and wrote down the time of arrival. He looked for dangerous overhead limbs and burning tree tops, then put the men to work building firelines where the fire was most likely to burn the hottest. Then he looked for spot fires and sized up the situation. He would call the dispatcher, confirm that they had found the fire, and let him know whether they could handle it without any additional help.

The men cut a fireline about two feet wide down to mineral soil. If a log crossed the fireline, a long chunk was sawed out by using a crosscut saw. There were places where the fireline had to be almost three feet deep because of rotten wood, limbs and leaves accumulated over the years. With the fireline almost complete, a place was cleared out to fall a live tree which was burning briskly high in the top. Two men kept close watch for burning embers falling down, while two men proceeded to fall the four foot tree with a crosscut saw. It took about an hour to lay the burning tree in the cleared-out bed. All four men started working on the hot tree top the moment it hit the ground.

Sometimes a burning tree literally blows up when it shatters. All the wood and pitch seams are pre-heated. The burning heavy fuels had to be pulled apart. Many shovels of dirt were thrown on the hot flames to cool it down enough to get near the fire. Water isn't always available, but is used extensively when it is. The men worked far enough apart so no one could get hurt by a swinging axe or hit with a shovel of dirt. They wear long-sleeved shirts and heavy laced boots. Rarely do the men wear gloves, especially during mop-up Their hats are made of aluminum, which will withstand quite a blow on the head should a limb fall from a tree.

Finally the fire was under control, which meant that the fireline was built all around the fire, all the hot spots were taken care of and the fire was ready to mop up. Mop up is the dirtiest job of all. It takes several days to die out a small fire some times. Every spark must be put out or a breeze might fan it to life after the firefighters have left it unattended. A fire that takes off from a spark left by a careless firefighter is called a blow-up.

Many times when a fire blows up, it is much bigger than before. That is the reason a smoke-chaser must stay with his fire for six daylight hours after the last smoke or spark is out.

The only way to detect and extinguish the last spark in a forest fire is to actually work out the hot spots on your hands and knees, running your fingers deep into the black ashes, being very careful not to miss any part of the fire. Of course, a large fire is mopped up similarly, but generally with water and special mop up equipment. I have never known a smoke-chaser to blister his hands cold-trailing a fire. When he feels a sudden change in temperature, he jerks his hand back and digs the hot spot out with his shovel. After mixing cool mineral soil with the hot ashes, he can soon run his fingers all around through the mixture and know for sure nothing is hot enough to scatter fire. The Fry Creek fire took two days and one night to suppress and mop-up. It covered about one tenth of an acre.

CHAPTER 7

AUSTIN'S LAST STAND

The summer at Lodgepole was beginning to trail off into fall. Soon we would be closing down the lookouts and bringing the men back to civilization. The towers would be closed up and secured for the winter. Devil's Peak Lookout was always the first one to be abandoned. Doug had a few other trips lined up for me to make, too. The trail crew was ready to be moved and two of the lookouts needed supplies.

Before the busy fall season began, the horses and mules needed to be reshod. It was still about six weeks before they would be turned out on their winter pasture. There were nine head of stock and the horseshoer, Jim West, needed a lot of luck to get the job done in one day. On Wednesday, Doug called and said that Jim would be at Lodgepole by 7:00 the next morning.

I caught up the stock and tied them to the hitching rail to be ready when Jim arrived. Things went quite well the first two hours. The horses were shod and now it was Austin's turn. Austin, it seemed, was always a rough one to put shoes on. I don't know what was wrong with him, but the moment Jim's pickup crossed the cattleguard his hair stood on end, including his mane. His eyes got big and his ears pointed forward. He tried his luck at breaking loose from the hitching rail, and he never ate a mouthful of hay after Jim arrived.

Austin was shaking when I led him around to the end of the hitching rail. He tensed up like a cat ready to pounce on a gopher. His feet were spread apart, his nostrils flared and his eyes were big. He was very alert. Jim laid out four mule shoes and put his tools in place. He took Austin's halter rope loose from the hitching rail and worked his way down the rope toward the mules neck. Jim always had a way with stock, and he caught Austin off guard. He patted his neck and reached for a front foot. Austin reared straight up on his hind legs and struck at Jim with both front feet. He was fixing to get his tormentor one way or another. His lips were turned wrongside out. His mouth was wide open and his teeth were shining. If Jim hadn't been fast on the getaway, he would have got stomped and bit all at once.

Another try or two and Jim, being a stubborn person, resorted to other means. Austin seemed to know how to react to each thing he tried. Jim tied one of the mule's hind feet up by making a solid loop in the end of a half-inch rope. The loop was slipped over his neck, then was worked around his left hind foot with the end brought up through the loop and tightened up enough so the foot was held off the ground. I watched as he tied the rope off at the loop. It would be interesting to see what would happen when Jim started working on that left hind foot.

Austin had it all figured out. He let Jim pull his foot forward and start to work pulling off the old shoe. About the time things seemed to be going good, he came to life and stood on his front feet and kicked in a half circle, aiming

every rapid blow in Jim's direction. The only thing that spoiled his aim was a rope around one hind foot. As soon as Jim was out of reach, Austin settled down again. Jim tried to conquer the mule by putting a twitch on his nose. About two feet of an axe handle with a 3/8 inch hole drilled through the little end and a piece of 1/4 inch rope run through the hole to form a six or eight inch loop was called a twitch. Jim just happened to have one in his horseshoeing gear.

After a few tries, he managed to get a handful of Austin's nose. It hurt him just enough to make him hold still while Jim slipped the twitch loop over the loose flabby skin. He twisted the handle and made the loop tight. Each time Austin moved, the loop was tightened up a little more. It still didn't work. I held the twitch and twisted until I just knew Austin would have to grow a new end on his nose; but he still sized up the situation, took aim and tried his best to get at Jim. We gave up the twitch after Austin wheeled and spun me around so fast it bent me double over the hitching rail.

There was one more thing Jim wanted to try. First he built a couple of loops like lassos and laid them on the ground. One loop was for Austin's front feet and the other for his hind feet. The mule stepped into both loops at about the same time. Jim jerked one rope tight and I pulled the other one up. He got over-balanced and went to his knees, then rolled over on his side and we stretched him out.

While the mule was momentarily motionless, all four feet were tied together. We tied a pole to his feet, then with Jim taking hold of one end and me the other, we put Austin in a good shoeing position. It wasn't hurting him anymore than if he was carrying a full pack on his back. Jim put shoes on Austin without too much trouble after that. We let the mule up and he tried one more time to kick Jim and barely missed him. Jim made a phone call to Doug and told him how Austin performed. The district ranger was informed, and a decision was made right then to sell or transfer Austin off the district. As ornery as Austin was, I knew we would miss him very much.

Doug went with me to close Devil's Peak Lookout for the winter. It was a beautiful sunny day, although the fire danger in the high country wasn't high enough to justify keeping a man up there watching for fires any longer. We took three mules, Tom, Dillon and, of course, good old Austin. I rode Smokey and Doug rode his favorite mount, Sundee.

It was thirteen miles from Lodgepole to the lookout and we could travel about three miles an hour uphill, empty. Four miles of our route was along a gravelled road. When we reached the trail at Black Bear Camp, Dillon was in the lead with Tom swinging along close at his heels. Austin was hustling along, his lead rope tied back to his own packsaddle. I turned in the saddle and watched him amble along. He acted like a mischievous teenager. He would jump at the slightest movement at the side of the trail. A cottontail rabbit scampered away through the brush. Austin jumped and squared off, facing the little animal and watching until it went out of sight behind a clump of brush. He reached out and grabbed a big mouthful of green vegetation, consisting of blackberry vines, Mountain Brome and Russian thistle. Most anything green tasted good to Austin.

The visibility from Devil's Peak was a sight to see. The air was free of haze,

even down in the hundreds of canyons in every direction. Cinches were loosened; and Doug and I, with saddlebags over our shoulder, headed for a high point to eat our lunches and enjoy the spectacular view. Doug told me the names of several places he had not mentioned before, mainly because it seemed we were always on the move. I believe that the Ranger Springs country and the Oregon Desert were the most fascinating to me. I intended to make a pack trip to each place and explore them from one end to the other. The rough and rugged country of Mudjekeewis on the east end of Kerby Hill was also a mysterious looking place.

It seemed to take a long time to close Devil's Peak. I lowered the shutters while Doug put oil on every piece of metal equipment and furnishings, including the fire finder. The light oil would prevent rusting during damp weather. Including Neil Richardson's personal belongings, two Forest Service radios and other articles, we had three heavy mule loads to pack out. It took us almost five hours to button the place up, get packed and head out. I was tying on the last load just as the sun was dropping behind Lucifer Mountain. We mounted up and headed down the trail.

For two miles, the trail was steep and rough. Austin laid down one time and tried his best to get rid of his pack. The hitch we used was one Doug had invented. If anything went wrong, the ropes would always come loose and the whole pack had to be rearranged again and lashed down. We lost a lot of time repacking during the trip from Devil's Peak to the junction of Alta Lake Trail. From there to Boulder Lake should be pretty good going.

We watered the stock at Heather Ponds while Doug pointed out to me where a trail camp would be set up next season. The two snow-water ponds were named after the thick vegetation called heather, which covers the ground. It is a small bushy plant that grows about a foot high and has a little pink flower that blends in with the tiny green leaves. It's a beautiful high mountain shrub. The Forest Service specification for material to make uniforms from is called heather green.

From the Alta Lake Junction, it was but a half-mile to Alta Lake. Fish jumped to mar the glassy surface of the water. The trail followed along the lake's bank from one end to the other, which is about three quarters of a mile. Below Alta Lake a mile or so, is a small snow water pond called Boulder Lake. It was getting so dark I could hardly make out the opening where the water was. I noticed the 5 Mile sign right near the trail. It has green letters with a white background. I could barely make it out.

All at once there was a lot of thumping and banging around up ahead of me. Austin had got ahead of Doug at Alta Lake. The mule decided to lay down again and try his luck getting rid of his pack. Doug couldn't figure why Sundee stopped so he touched her with his spurs. She reared up and started to jump over Austin. I'm sure that if I could see in the dark like those horses and mules, it would have been worth seeing. Austin saw Sundee start to jump over him. He jumped up so quickly, he got over-balanced and fell toward her, almost knocking her down. Tom and Dillon jerked loose from Doug and took off through the night. They really kicked up a dust because I could smell it.

I got down and caught Austin before he took off. He finally settled down so we could repack his load again. This time, we had to start from scratch. The

pack saddle had to be taken off and almost rebuilt. Two butt straps were broken and one end of the breast collar broke loose. An hour later by groping around in the dark, we managed to get Austin's pack back on him and continue on down the trail. We didn't dare turn on a flashlight. The mules just never seemed to get used to a sudden flash of light cutting the darkness like a two-cell light would do. Our pack string would be scattered over half of Jackson County if we used a light.

It was so dark you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. The trail wasn't too bad down across the north end of Gopher Ridge. We were almost to Bigham Springs when Tom must have smelled a clump of green grass above the trail and headed up toward it. Being at the tail-end of the line, I heard him leave the trail and, proceeded to head him off. There was no time to stop and eat.

Smokey left the trail with me and started picking her way up through rocks and boulders I couldn't see. She walked across a large rock with the flat surface flush with the ground. She didn't slip until she was almost to the upper edge. The rock laying on a 15% slope was very bad footing, to say the least, and she slipped. For a few seconds she was running in place, full speed. I saw blue and white sparks fly off her shoes nearly six inches long - and a lot of them. She didn't fall down, but it was quite exciting sitting up there above all the fracas. Tom came on down to the trail and we made it almost to Three Mile Meadow before we had any more excitement.

Yellow jackets usually get meaner and the nests more frequent in the fall of the year. We started past a big Douglas-fir that had uprooted, with the root system near the trail. It made a perfect place for yellow jackets to build a nest and be sheltered from wind and rain. Doug made it past the nest okay, but the next one in line didn't. All the yellow jackets came from the nest in one big swarm and spread out, trying to sting everything that moved.

Believe me, there was plenty of movement. It seemed like each mule got stung about the same time. They pulled out and left me in their dust. Smokey didn't catch on for a moment, until one stung her on the end of her nose. She took a deep breath like she had stepped in cold water, and then started jumping up and down. I had an awful time getting her headed down the trail at a speed faster than a yellow jacket can fly, but she finally got underway.

I heard Doug let out a war whoop way down the trail someplace and I knew he was having fun. We were well toward the west end of Three Mile Meadow before things got under control in a clearing near Wallowa Creek. Austin was still kicking occasionally, but finally gave up when his bee stings quit hurting.

We straightened up the packs and rested for a moment, laughing about the incident. It wouldn't be long now before we reached the trails end, so we mounted our horses and headed for Imnaha. At the end of the trail, we followed a road for a mile before we turned off on a short spur which led us to the Imnaha corral.

It was 11:00 o'clock at night, but we could see a light at Imnaha house and we knew Corbett Smith would have hot coffee and supper would be ready. Doug thought it would be a good idea to let out with a loud Indian war-whoop to let Corbett know we had arrived. He didn't give me any warning of what he had in mind. He took in a deep breath and cut loose with an ear-splitting yell

that rattled the tree limbs, and away he went. His horse spooked and jumped ahead so fast Doug was near to falling off. His yell trailed off and sounded like when you throw a corn cob at a crowing rooster. All three mules stampeded at once. Smokey jumped sideways, clear out in the thick brush, with me. It took her a moment to get wound up, and the next instant she had her head hanging over the corral gate. But Corbett didn't hear us until we knocked on the door at the house.

Sure enough, he had a fresh batch of coffee and supper was ready. The meal tasted good even though it was about two hours old. After supper, we left the stock at Imnaha and drove to Lodgepole. Doug stayed just long enough for me to get my saddle bags out of the rig, then he went on to Butte Falls. My wife was still up and wasn't too worried about my being late. I was tired, but felt good. I tossed my spurs in a corner near the telephone table and the noise woke Don up. Tricia was right behind him when he came running to me. It wasn't long before Janna was standing there between my knees looking wide-eyed and listening to every word I had to say about the day's happenings.

The evenings were cold and the ground was always white with frost each morning. Autumn colors were showing everywhere. It was a beautiful sight to look out through the tall timber and see the blazing red leaves of the vine maple showing through the green trees. We had had a pretty rough summer, but now the fire danger was low. Doug got big-hearted and let me have all weekend off.I had been on duty almost seven days a week and all hours of the day and night all summer, though I got paid for five days a week and eight hours a day. The only reason I had stayed with the job was the love I had for those big black Government mules and the saddle horses.

We got a good rest away from Lodgepole and arrived back about half a day sooner than we had planned. We loved the place because of the freedom and quietness. I had to make a drag to Bessie Rock early the next day to close the lookout and bring the man and his belongings home for the winter.

Seven o'clock the next morning found me on the trail headed toward Bessie Rock eight miles away. It was just a little cold down in the draws and canyons. The trail cut through an old burn down across Fool's Creek where bear tracks always showed up in the dust. Soon we came to a long stretch of trail that descended toward the Middle Fork of Rogue River, past a marshy place where split poles had to be laid side by side to form a stable tread on the trail. The cut bank on the upper side of the trail had water dripping down from mossy vegetation, forming little pools of cold water about horse-high. On hot days, I would take a couple bottles of soda pop in my saddlebags and hide them in one of these pools. Then on my return trip late in the evening, the cold drink was a most welcome treat.

The Middle Fork had been rough to cross all summer because of a washout on the south bank. Austin would wait on the bank like he was watching to see if everyone else made it before he tried to cross. Dillon staggered when the current hit him and nearly swept him off his feet. Sundee didn't slow down at all. On the other side of the river, I turned in the saddle to see what Austin would do this time. He was gone. For a moment I feared he may have crossed too far down and been swept under, but instead he had turned around and started back home. He trotted back up the trail about a hundred yards then turned and

came down the trail as fast as a mule can run, stopped momentarily on the river bank and then jumped as far as he could and landed in deep water. For a moment all I could see were two long ears above the churning splashing water, then out he came full blast, seemingly carrying half the river with him. I sat on Sundee and laughed at the knothead as he walked up and stood broadside about six feet away from me and shook himself violently. Austin was the most unpredictable mule I ever worked with. Seemed as though he liked to make me laugh, and he was really living it up. This would be Austin's last pack trip. He would be transferred as soon as papers could be made out. I felt sad as I rode on toward Bessie Rock.

Bessie Rock is a giant pinnacle sticking straight up from the top of a ridge just south of Red Blanket Creek. Another shorter pinnacle sits next to it. Perched on top of the tallest rock is a 14 x 14 foot house with glass windows all the way around it. Access to the house is a 96 foot ladder with the longest span of 56 feet. It is 110 feet from the ground to the floor of the lookout house. The ladder went straight up the side of the rock. Bessie Rock was the only lookout in the country where the man on duty could open a can of pork and beans, toss the can out the door toward the steep side, heat the can of beans and eat them before the can hit the rock slide below.

When we arrived at the foot of the rock, I tied the stock up, threw my saddle bags over my shoulder and climbed the ladder. The young college student had his books and belongings packed and was anxious to head out until I handed him his mail from home. While he read his mail, I sat there and looked the country over. It was a beautiful sight. I could see the place where I spotted my first fire, the flat area where Lodgepole was and the country I had ridden all summer. If only the summer were six months longer.

It took the two of us to close the lookout for the winter. There are two wooden shutters on each side, hinged from the top so they could be raised and lowered. They were held up all summer by a 2 x 2 stake six feet long at the comers of each shutter. To let the shutters down, the guy wires had to be taken loose, the shutters put down and then the guy wires anchored solid again. The guy wire at the southeast corner was the tricky one. I tied a half inch rope around my waist and anchored the other end to something I knew would hold if I slipped over the side. The young student held the rope as I eased myself down and loosened the turnbuckle on the guy wire. I could look down about three hundred feet. Someone had to be let down over the side twice a year - once to cut the guy wires loose and once to hook them up again.

Everything taken off Bessie Rock was let down in a special cable car which we operated with a hand winch. It took only a moment for the car to go from top to bottom, but took about twenty minutes to crank it back up to the top. It rode on a cable which was anchored to a tree about a hundred yards from the base of the rock.

I loaded Austin light and let him eat all the huckleberry brush he wanted. Dillon seemed to understand why he carried the biggest load. The young man took off down the trail ahead of me. Being an athlete, the eight mile walk to Imnaha was just a good hike for him.

Austin had a sixth sense which he seemed to use only when a yellow jacket nest was within stinging distance. He always managed to stir them up enough

to really put a pack string on the go. We ran into two nests on the way home, and Austin was the cause of it both times, when he left the trail to eat huckleberry brush. Both times we covered a quarter of a mile in record time, but we made the whole trip without repacking. A car was waiting for the young student at Imnaha. We shook hands and I never saw him again. I have even forgotten his name, but suppose, like most college students, he is a doctor, lawyer or professor in some big city someplace.

After unpacking at Imnaha, I took a curry comb and brushed Austin off good and combed out his tail. I gave him all the oats he would eat. A mule won't hurt himself eating oats even if he has to leave some in the box. As I walked slowly down toward Imnaha house with my saddle bags over my shoulder, and my hat in hand, I wondered what would happen to Austin.

I called Doug on the telephone from Imnaha and let him know everything was shut down on Bessie Rock and that his fireman would report to headquarters within the hour.

Doug asked me if Austin was there and how he performed that day. He told me that a Government trapper by the name of Kerby Tant would be up the following day to pick him up. He would haul him down to a pasture someplace in the Rogue River Valley. Also, Doug told me to prepare to move back to Butte Falls the next day. Slash burning time was at hand and we had several hundred acres to burn that fall. Doug would expect to see me the day after moving back to town.

Soon the rumble of a car motor came from down the road. It was Bea and the kids coming to pick me up. As we headed for Lodgepole, I told them we would be moving out the next day. Bea had most everything packed up because we knew it wouldn't be long before the season was over.

It was exciting to move again and go back to civilization; but when we passed over the cattleguard and left our summer home behind, it was almost more than the kids could stand.

There was much turmoil and rearranging at our home in Butte Falls. Boy, were we tired out by bed time.

The following morning I reported for duty at 7:15 a.m. at the Butte Falls Ranger Station. Doug always looked to me as his right-hand man from the first day we worked together. Although he never let me run a crew, he always had me to drive a Government truck and depended on me to round up equipment and supplies so our project work could be accomplished more efficiently.

We spent an hour in Doug's office discussing fall and winter work. He told me that Kerby Tant had come to Imnaha and picked up Austin. The mule had walked right in the small horse trailer without any protest. The big mule stood still and well balanced as Kerby's pickup pulled the trailer down the bumpy road. Doug was happy to get rid of Austin, but a lump appeared in my throat at that moment and never left me for some time.

In a couple weeks, we had burned around 800 acres of slash which included several clear-cuts where every single tree was cut down and logged out. One day as we headed for work, I happened to be riding alone with Doug. He brought up the subject about Austin again and told me how and where he ended up.

Kerby took the mule to his own home ranch where he was pastured until

a later date. He kept close watch of Austin because the mule might jump the fence and head back to Butte Falls. Each time Austin saw Kerby he would come running and allow the kindly man to scratch his ears. He gave him a bucket of oats and some choice alfalfa hay everyday.

Mr. Tant was a trapper, hired by the U.S. Government. His job was to trap out concentrations of coyotes and run cougars with his hounds. There were other animals that he trapped and killed if they became a nuisance. The trapper accomplished this by using special bait in some cases.

Coyotes would move into the open fields in late fall to catch gophers, mice and other rodents. Soon they would get used to civilization and come closer to cattle and the barns and other outbuildings. Kerby would be called upon and a bunch of coyotes were killed off because they would kill chickens, ducks, turkeys, and now and then a calf or two. They also pulled down deer when four or five worked together.

It was one of these times when Austin would perform his last duty as a Government mule. Mr. Tant got a call from his boss and asked him to move into a spot at the north end of the Rogue River Valley to trap out a concentration of coyotes and a bear or two. Seems as though the cattle man who lived there had lost calves, hogs, sheep and a lot of feathered fowl.

Austin was easily caught. He walked right up the tailgate and into the trailer. Kerby tossed a couple dozen coyote traps in the front seat and got his 30.30 loaded, then pulled out for the back country ranch.

Two hours later Austin was taken from the horse trailer. That was his last ride. Kerby lead the mule to an oak at the far end of an open field and tied him in the shade. That was Austin's last walk.

The man walked away from the mule and crawled through a wire fence about a hundred yards away. The Government trapper felt like he was about to murder his best friend but never-the-less he had no choice. He had to make a living for his family in his job as a trapper hired by the U.S. Government.

He checked his gun and thumbed the hammer back. To be sure of making a dead shot, he rested the gun barrel over a fence post and took careful aim. Austin's huge ears came into view through the telescope sight. He was looking right toward the Government hunter. Kerby couldn't pull the trigger. He let the hammer back down and leaned the gun against the fence. Then he walked around looking for coyote tracks and some sign of bear for about ten minutes, trying to work up enough courage to do the task at hand.

At the same time Austin had been eating grass and dried leaves beneath the tree, while the mule's head was down, Kerby grabbed the gun. He thumbed the hammer back, took careful aim and tugged at the trigger. Near silence was broken by the roar of the exploding shell. Blue smoke filled the air around him. The sound echoed up the canyons and bounced off the hillsides. A band of sheep scattered and ran toward the barn corral. Startled chickens cackled and flew in every direction. A flock of black birds flew from nearby oak trees in frightened haste to escape the unusual commotion. Then, dead silence. Without suffering any pain, Austin was suddenly turned into coyote bait.

That was my first twinge of hard feelings I ever felt toward the U.S. Forest Service. Being a new man, it appeared to me that no one showed any respect whatsoever for a faithful mule who had carried thousands of pounds of

equipment and supplies to and from the remote areas of activity on the forest. Austin had been condemned because he turned out to be a kicker. I found out a few years later that a would-be packer had caused him to become one.

Doug and I rode on up the road toward our day's work in silence. That fall, one day in early November, Doug had me ride and lead the horses and mules from Lodgepole to Bowen Creek pasture to spend the winter months. The pasture is about six miles east from Butte Falls and twenty some odd miles from Lodgepole.

The mules were black and glossy. That meant they were in top shape to start the winter. Soon the horseshoer would come and pull their shoes and someone from the Ranger Station would feed and care for them, when the snow storms turned everything white.

CHAPTER 8

RETURN TO LODGEPOLE

The day after my seasonal job with the Forest Service ended, I went to work for Medco, a local logging company. I had been a logger and sawmill worker for several years before I fell in love with the Forest Service and the big, black, Government mules.

Logging is the main industry in this part of Southern Oregon. A man has to be tough to live a logger's life. Some loggers think they are a lot tougher than they really are, generally the new comers and the old timers. I have seen men crippled and killed in the woods and have helped to pack them out. I've visited them in the hospitals and gone to their funerals, too. When I was eighteen, a timber faller was killed when a top cut from a Douglas fir swung around and smashed him against a tree he was standing behind. He was an old timer. I felt like I knew just what to do, no matter what happened and couldn't have been more mistaken. I fought the winter snows and mud trying to earn a living for my family. Once I got my leg broken and had a dozen close calls a day. Hopefully this winter would be the last of my logging to earn a living.

At last the day arrived when I intended to quit the logging woods. It was raining at the 4,000 foot level. Snow was melting and the landing was hip-pocket deep with mud. Lee Coffman was the jammer puncher. We hooked the logs and he raised them up with the big machine and loaded them on the trucks. The jammer resembles a steam shovel and is mounted on wheels. The whole body of the machine revolves on a cog wheel on the chassis. A swinging boom attached to the front is held up by a one-inch cable called a hogline. The heavy line is threaded back and forth through pulleys so the boom can be lowered and raised by using the controls inside the cab.

Mounted directly at the base of the swinging boom is a drum with cable around it. The cable extends from the drum up to the end of the boom and hangs down over a large pulley about eighteen inches in diameter. This cable is called the main line and has a heavy-duty hook fastened at the end. Attached to this are two twenty-foot cables called a crotch-line. At the end of the crotch-lines are bell-hooks, which resemble a boomerang. A clevis fastens a hook to the end of each crotch-line. At the other end of the boomerang shaped piece of steel, is the bell-hook part. It is about four inches across and round. The outer edge is built up and sharpened so as to stick into the end of a log. Protruding from the center of the bell is a sharp steel point about three inches long. The steel point is maybe an inch and a quarter across the base and tapers to a needle-sharp point. When a bell-hook is set in the end of a log, it holds securely until the log is hoisted to position on a truck. Attached to the back of the hook is a rope so the hook tender can jerk it loose and hook another log.

About 2:00 p.m. we had just loaded a truck and my partner and I were

decking logs for the next load. Lee put the power to the machine and raised a big log about two feet above the mud. The end of the main line raveled and broke just above the crotch line. The log dropped in the mud and splattered everything and everybody within seventy feet in all directions. Lee lowered the main line so we could make repairs.

There were four of us standing in the center of the landing directly under the boom. We needed a little more slack to get the end of the main line down to a log so we could cut the frayed ends off and tie a new figure eight knot to hold the crotch-line hook. Lee released the brake to lower the boom. At that moment, I saw the hogline ravel and start to come in two.

Being an expert in his work, Lee felt the boom give a little and shouted a warning. We got back in the clear so he could lower the boom to the ground and make further repairs. About five minutes passed by. I knew the day was over as far as loading any more trucks, so I took off my muddy, water-proof rain clothes and rinsed them off in a water hole nearby. I put them in my packsack and climbed on the crew bus parked on the road. As I sat watching from the bus, I saw the hogline start to come in two the rest of the way. The big machine shuddered and the heavy boom crashed to the muddy landing. The end of the boom disappeared in the mud in the exact spot where I had been standing moments before. Gobs of mud splattered against the crew bus window and obscured my view.

A lot of thoughts went through my mind about then. I groped in my packsack and found a thermos bottle and poured myself a cup of coffee. As I sipped the hot liquid, I kept my eyes trained on the road leading out of the woods. I never looked back as we drove away. I was mighty thankful to be alive. That day was the last day I ever worked as a logger. Wintertime can be beautiful and enchanting; but under those circumstances, the beauty only got in a man's way.

When I got a permanent full-time job with the Forest Service, that was when I saw the real beauty in winter weather.

There were times when the sky would get so dark it would seem unnatural. Snowflakes the size of silver dollars would float to the ground. It would pile up as much as six inches an hour.

The landscape would change drastically. One evening about a half hour before dark, I sat on the edge of the fireplace hearth and looked out the picture window at a scene of poetic splendor. The tall slim Douglas fir, pine, white fir and several other species of trees grew to a height of 50 to 250 feet where I lived. The falling snow clung to the boughs and built up so much I couldn't see the tree trunks.

The weight of the snow in the trees caused them to sway back and forth. There wasn't the slightest breeze to get them started. As I watched, I noticed that the tallest trees swayed much farther than the shorter ones. Every tree was swaying back and forth very slowly. They were as silent as windblown grass. It was as though they were swaying back and forth and keeping time to a mysterious silent music, which the human ear couldn't hear. The movement of the forest giants had a hypnotic effect on my thoughts as darkness caused the scene to fade away into the black of night. The memory of such a sight will stay with me to my dying day.

On the first of March that spring, I went back to work for the Forest Service. I marked and cruised timber, planted trees and worked in engineering. The snow seemed to hang on for such a long time. Doug met me when I came to work one morning and said I would be working with him from then on. Trails needed to be opened up, roads had to be cleared and telephone lines would be put back into working condition. Later, we would get the old CCC Camp Two ready for fire school, which usually lasted about four days.

The spring of 1954 Doug put me through the mill at fire school again. Compass and pacing, map reading, small crew action and actual fire suppression. On the smoke-chasing course, I followed a compass course for one mile, determined by pacing and keeping track of my distance (one pace is two normal steps). By counting paces, a trainee knew when he had beat the brush for a mile. The fire I was to locate was merely some red tags on a stump with a number on them. I missed my fire about thirty feet. Map reading was a bearcat. They put me at a long table with several other trainees and we were handed a map. I almost didn't make it because I was sitting with my back to the north, so the north side of my map was pointing south. All the answers to questions asked me were a half-turn off.

The small fire suppression was quite a trial. Real fires were started by a very sharp instructor, like Lowell Ash, the Fire Control Officer from the Union Creek District. He built up a pile of dry debris consisting of pitch limbs piled up on a pitch log with a pitch stump close by. Near the fire was a pine tree with a large scar just oozing with sap and sticky pitch. The dry grass and pine needles were thick in every direction. To make matters worse, he lighted the fire by using diesel soaked wood shavings. I teamed up with a young school teacher who, if he survived, would be on the Huckleberry Mountain Lookout.

When Lowell touched a lighted match to the conglomeration of highly inflammable material, it was the beginning of several hours of work. The flame got bigger and hotter. The whole blamed pile was burning furiously. With shovel in hand, I made a move toward the blazing inferno; but Lowell anticipated what I was going to do.

He wrapped one big arm around me and the other around my partner.

Lowell let the pine needles catch on fire and the blaze spread rapidly toward the pitch pine tree. The fire was beginning to lick at the sticky pitch, then it fairly blew up and flames were twenty feet up the side of the tree in an instant. Lowell held us back long enough and then said, "Go get it, boys." Believe me, we did.

We had to put the fire out with dirt. We both threw dirt into the boiling, churning, white-hot blaze, which now covered a thirty-foot circle with a burning pine tree near the center. With our fire packs in a safe place, we continued to work and sweat. At last the flames began to yield to the cool moist dirt and we could get closer to the burning debris. To separate the burnable fuels was now the next step. In half an hour, we were pulling and tearing the pile apart and the fire was getting cooler. Our fire trail was finished and we were going to take a short break, except for one thing. I saw two spot fires caused from what we thought was sparks from our fire.

Spot fires sometimes trap men and burn them up if not detected in time. We had to treat each spot fire the same as the main fire. We had to build

firelines around them, mop them up and keep watch to make sure they were dead out. Three hours later, black and dirty, we sat down to watch for tiny smokes to show up. When smoke appeared from the dug-up areas, it meant that there was something hot underneath. Lowell came around to see what kind of job we had done. All the other trainees were on hand to hear what he said. We found out then that the two spot fires had been lighted by one of Lowell's helpers. He wanted to stress the importance of looking for spot fires every so often while suppressing and moping up a fire of any size.

The last day of fire school seemed to come too soon. Time went by so fast when there was excitement day and night. All 90 or 100 trainees took a final test. No one flunked the course. The questions missed were merely used as a guide for follow-up training on the districts. When I got home that night, Bea and the kids met me in the yard. I told them they were in store for a surprise. Doug wanted us to move back to Lodgepole as soon as we could get packed and ready. I would ride the horses and mules up the next day and the day after that we would move to our summer home. That evening there was much planning and packing amongst the three little Walkers. They wanted to take everything they owned, plus some things they had borrowed from the neighbor kids.

My wife spent the following day packing dishes, clothes and most of the things we would need for the summer. I went to Bowen Creek and rounded up my horses and the good old Government mules. This year Austin wouldn't be with me. Sundee was a lively mare and acted up some when she felt the cinch tighten up for the first time in several months. I caught all the others, tied them together and headed north.

At 6:30 that evening, we went through the gate at Lodgepole. They seemed glad to get back on fresh green grass and the high mountain air. Doug met me with a government pickup and took me back to Butte falls. I borrowed a truck to move. We were loaded and headed for Lodgepole early the next day.

As we drove across the cattleguard, the children shouted for joy. What a good feeling it was to have all summer to look forward to. Don led the way as Tricia and Janna followed. Moments later, I saw them lying on their tummies on the bank of the shallow creek drinking from the swift running stream. Small ripples splashed up on their faces bathing them in pure, very cold water as they screamed with joy. We had a new-comer this year. Our baby girl, Leslie was around seven months old. She would surely get a good start in life at Lodgepole.

A picnic lunch by the creek, picking wild strawberries in the yard, scouting out old forts they had built the year before all contributed to tiring them out. At bedtime, we had to hold them down for just a moment and they were doing their scouting in dreamland. What a wonderful place to raise a family and teach them how to live in the wilderness!

I felt much different about my job this year. We had a new district ranger who owned horses which would be at Lodgepole with the other stock. I was to use them all summer as needed. I bought myself a big black horse called Old Bud, who was scared to death of cars. There were nine head of stock scattered around the pasture. My feelings about the smoke-chasing and packing job was different, now that I had one season of experience behind me. I felt like a real

mule-skinner and could hardly wait to make my first pack trip, which would be to good old Bessie Rock. I would again be making trips to Devil's Peak and Blue Rock and recreation and trail crews would have to be packed in. Of course there would also be fire crews throughout the fire season.

There would be quite a variety of large articles going into the high country this summer, which might give some problems, things like prefab toilets, fence posts and garbage-pit covers. The toilets were done up in bundles which weighed about 150 pounds each. The components were sorted and weighed out so two bundles would make one toilet. There were twelve prefab toilets to pack to the recreation spots in the high country. The garbage-pit covers consisted of six 2 x 12 inch redwood boards six foot long with a 2 x 2 foot lid and several 2 x 4 boards for cross pieces. There were a dozen or so pit covers which I would pack, one to a mule, to campgrounds in the high Cascade camping areas. The fence posts were heavy yew wood. They would be used as corner posts for a new pasture fence at Grass Lake in the Seven Lakes Basin.

Our new district ranger, Britt Ash, was a horseman. He had done a lot of riding and packing in different parts of the country. He came to Lodgepole to get acquainted one day and we decided to put a load of posts on his strawberry roan mare. She was a wild-eyed old girl. You could see the whites of her eyes all the way around the colored part. She was a wall-eyed mare that would chaw the bark right off a green tree while you put a saddle on her.

Britt caught her and I helped get the pack saddle cinched up good and tight. We tied two posts on each side with a special hitch he used. After a few steps forward, the mare began to buck. I saw daylight under all four feet two or three times before the posts started coming loose. By the time she settled down, the saddle pads were almost out from under the pack saddle. She bucked hard and the posts were scattered about. We learned one thing from our efforts. The hitch would hold, clear up to the last few jumps. The hitch I had been using wouldn't have held the posts on with the mare just walking.

Next, we put a load of lumber on the strawberry roan. She bucked like a fool for a moment then got tired and settled down. We put a pack-saddle on Dillon, rounded up some bags with boxes, and Britt taught me how to throw his special hitch. I practiced it until I knew it by heart, then I modified it to suit myself. The hitch was put on in such a way that the bags or boxes can be pulled away from the mule and held there. Three ropes go over the top of the pack which can be placed anywhere you want them.

This modified hitch proved to be better than a diamond or any other kind of a hitch. I could put on a single or double diamond hitch and another kind of diamond hitch with the cinch in the middle of the rope. I used Doug's old hitch plus the new one I had just learned and got so I could put my lash on a mule in two minutes flat and it would hold a load on a bucking mule longer than any other hitch. When there were five pack animals in the pack string, I used five different hitches just for kicks.

There is a certain romance about lashing a pack to a mule and watching him perform. Each one has his or her own peculiar habits that dominate their personality traits. By now, my love and feelings for those Government mules was certainly growing. My job working for the U.S. Forest Service was, without a doubt, the best thing that could ever have happened to my family and I. To

live at Lodgepole, was a most wonderful experience.

Early snow on the Cascade Divide

Gordon Jesse Walker and Corbett Smith
(spring telephone maintenance)

CHAPTER 9

THIRD SEASON OF ROUGH AND READY AND OUR PET, FREDDY

My first year working with the horses and mules was my worst. Doug went with me on almost every trip. He set the pace and figured out all the schedules. We always started late in the day and got back late at night. The pack stock got some bad cinch rubs because of the hitch we used. Britt Ash was a ranger who liked to see one man do a one-man job, instead of two men working on the same job. He worked it out so that this season I would be doing the packing alone. That sure sounded good to me, and I could hardly wait to get going. To ride and work alone was one thing that made up most of my working life.

My first trip was to take the lookout in to Bessie Rock. Once he saw the place, he didn't think much of it and came awful close to coming back with me. Things looked better after we got the shutters up and his food and other things hauled up to the house. The sun was shining bright and birds were singing. Chipmunks scampered around between the rocks below. I fired up the cookstove and put on a pot of coffee. That made the place seem more like home.

We ate our lunch, and the young man decided that maybe it wouldn't be so bad. After working with him on the fire finder an hour or so and teaching him the names of the local landmarks, I bade him farewell and climbed down the ladder. My horses and mules were ready to go home. Old Bud headed down the trail with me on his back leading Tom, Dillon and Smokey. I turned in the saddle and looked back toward Bessie Rock to see the new lookout waving to me from his summer home in the mountains. The Bessie Rock trip was uneventful except for the Middle Fork crossing. The water was still high and deep. We made it across without going down, but both my boots were filled with water before I could raise my feet up.

The Fourth of July was a busy time for fire guards. We had to issue fire permits and patrol campgrounds, sometimes until late at night. We were on duty continuously until everyone left the campgrounds after the big holiday.

We always packed in the Devil's Peak lookout about the sixth or seventh of July. Remembering the difficulty we had last year, I decided to make a trip to scout out the last section of the trail. I saddled Bud early one morning and headed for Devil's Peak with three or four cans of spray paint in my saddle bags. About a quarter of a mile above Frog Lake was the first drift. It was about five feet deep. In a short distance, we came to solid snow, ranging from four to ten feet deep. Bud walked on top of the frozen snow leaving footprints about an inch deep.

At the summit above Frog Lake, I took a can of blue paint and sprayed a mark on a tree now and then, often enough to see one mark from the other. As we went toward the main divide, the snow got deeper and appeared to be getting more rotten because the sun had warmed up a spot or two. Bud fell in a hole and I sprayed blue paint all over myself, my saddle, my horse and on the snow. The going was tough with just Bud and me, but I was sure of the trail through the bad places this time.

On the sixth of July, Neil Richardson drove into Lodgepole a little after 7:00 a.m. We visited for awhile, then I examined the supplies to be taken to Devil's Peak for him. It would take three pack animals to carry everything in one trip. Neil left everything with me and drove his car to the end of the trail. He would line out on foot ahead of me.

Neil said he was looking forward to going back to the lookout so he could rest up from a hard year of study at school. He would have a lot of time to study after working hours. I believed him because of all the books he had, about one mule load. There was quite a bit of food besides his clothes and other personal items. There were also a few things that went in on this trip that Neil would use for repair work on the lookout. I loaded Tom and Dillon first, then put the books on Smokey with a top pack of perishables. The loads looked good and evenly balanced. We headed toward Devil's Peak.

A half mile from Frog Lake we topped a little rise. Ahead of us was another pond that covered our trail for a quarter of a mile. The water was about belly-deep to the mules. Everything was so different than it was the last time I was here. We stopped briefly at Frog Lake. The little snow mosquitoes were a fright. Boy! Could those little guys bite! Many small streams of cold clear water wended their way down the slopes from the melting snowdrifts. I noticed that the blue paint sprayed on the trees looked like spot lights up ahead. We started over snow immediately beyond Frog Lake. The horses and mules traveled along like we were on solid ground,the snow was frozen solid.

About halfway between Heather Ponds and the divide, the trail climbed about a hundred feet, then went across a long rock slide. The sun had shone on the opening for several hours causing the snow to thaw out and get rotten. We were doing so well that I never once thought about soft snow until Dillon got down and was floundering around. He made it to his feet only to fall through again. This time he was too close to the edge of a steep ravine and over he went.

Tom broke through the snow and started to slide down the mountainside too. Bud fell with me, but I jumped off and managed to make it to solid frozen snow. Smokey was on her own and was doing quite well until both hind legs broke through, and down she went. She looked like an elephant laying on her side trying to swim, the way she was thrashing around. I had to cut the lash rope to get her pack off and help the old gal get to her feet. With Smokey and Bud in the clear, I went down to help Tom and Dillon.

Tom was still down on his side after sliding and rolling over one hundred feet down the mountainside. Dillon was standing in a little clump of trees puffing like a steam engine, but I cut Tom's lash rope so he could get up and led him to solid snow, repacked him and tied him to a tree. Dillon had worked his way over to where we were with his pack still in place except for being a

little lop-sided. By the time I repacked him along with Tom and Smokey, a lot of time had slipped by.

From here on out of the canyon, Tom and Dillon traveled with the lead ropes tied to their saddles. They walked down through the trees a ways then started toward the top. Bud and Smokey headed around the ridge to intercept the two mules. Smokey went down one more time but nothing bad happened. After we reached the main divide, the going got better for quite a ways until we topped out on a bench below the lookout. Against the hill was a snowdrift that covered an acre or so and was at least 35 feet deep, according to the height of the trees. It looked like I might have to chop out a trail to get over the frozen drift. Dillon knew where he was going. While I was looking things over, he had made up his mind.

He went downhill a ways then began to strike at the drift with both front feet. He turned sideways and stood there for a moment then away he went, walking on an angle up the steep slope of the drift without slipping. Tom followed and they stood on top looking down at the rest of us. Bud was as surefooted as any mule when it came to bad going. I touched him with my spurs and he followed the mules with Smokey struggling along behind.

Neil had reached the lookout and already had two shutters up. After unpacking the stock and loosening cinches, we sat down and ate lunch, which consisted of sandwiches and hot coffee that had survived the trip over the snow. We finished raising the shutters and cleaned up the place. Lightning rods and copper ground wire had to be looked over carefully for any loose connections. Neil's life depended on a good ground connection should the lookout house get a direct hit with a bolt of lightning.

The firefinder mounted in the center of the lookout house had to be levelled and oriented with the country. Neil would depend on this instrument to locate forest fires he might see during the summer. The Osborne firefinder is comparable in accuracy to a transit for measuring both horizontal and vertical angles. The vertical angle was determined by sliding a sight up and down in a track with a pointer indicating the degree of vertical angle by lining up cross hairs on the fire. The horizontal angle was determined by turning the azimuth circle or ring until the cross hairs were lined up on the fire. If the firefinder was oriented to north and south, a fire could be pinpointed and located on a district fireman's map to the exact township, range and section and sub-division. The smoke-chaser would use that reading and set his compass at a known point and go straight to the fire. Neil Richardson was one of the best fire detectors I ever knew. When I chased smoke on a fire he turned in, everyone knew that the information was good and true.

Seven Lakes Basin, below us to the north, was full of deep drifts of snow. Some of the lakes sparkled in the sunlight and looked inviting. Down around Grass Lake there wasn't too much snow. It was mostly in the timber. After Neil got squared away with all the shutters up, bed made and food put away so chipmunks couldn't run off with it, I packed up and headed down the trail. By now the snow in the openings was really rotten.

We dropped off the divide and followed our tracks and blue paint marks until we got to where the mules went over. I got off Bud so maybe he would have a better chance and not break through. We were making good time now,

everyone loaded light and headed for home. Just above Alta Lake Junction, I decided to ride again. You never see me out of my saddle leading a pack string. Bud was doing fine until we crossed another small opening, and he fell through the top crust astraddle of a down tree about two feet through and up off the ground. Bud was high centered for sure, and he couldn't touch the ground on either side of the log. The more he floundered, the worse it got. Finally he reared up on his hind legs and fell over backwards going almost out of sight under the snow. He laid there for awhile like he was done for. The mules were keeping their distance and watching every move we made. When Bud moved again, he moved fast and never stopped until he was standing near a tree where the snow hadn't thawed out. Of course when Bud first fell through the snow, I dove from the saddle to stay clear of trouble.

Lodgepole looked good to me by the time we rode through the gate. The only way we could see anything was with light reflecting out of the house windows. It was 10:00 o'clock before I sat down to supper. It's a long day sometimes when you work with a bunch of Government mules and horses. It was eighteen hours since I had walked out the back door and headed for Devil's Peak. The two mules and two horses, and myself, had lost weight on this trip. I have lost as much as six pounds on the first trip to Devil's Peak because of all the lifting and fighting to stay on top of the snow drifts. By fall I was slim as a road runner and tougher than nails. From now on for the rest of the season there would be pack trips almost everyday, and long hard ones at that.

For my family and me the summer started out much more thrillingly than our first season at Lodgepole. We knew the country now so consequently we took every opportunity to hunt up places we enjoyed most. One spot on the Parker Meadows Road near Big Ben Creek was a special favorite. A big pine tree had been blown over by the wind many years ago and was by now quite rotten. All that remained of the old tree was part of the root system and ten or twelve feet of tree trunk. It was about four feet in diameter. The rotten wood stayed damp almost all the time and made an ideal spot for tree seeds to germinate and grow. There were seven different species of evergreen trees growing from the top of the log. Each little tree was from one to four feet tall. The kids called it their miniature forest. We looked at the little forest many times during the years we spent at Lodgepole. Wild animals were fairly plentiful. There were deer, bear, bobcats, coyotes and plenty of squirrels and rabbits. Once Janna and I saw a big timber wolf. Elk herds roamed in the higher country.

One evening just before dark, we drove to Imnaha to get things ready for a pack trip the following day. Near Sumpter Creek a doe and a fawn came out of the timber and trotted down the road ahead of us. I slowed the car so the family could watch what took place and see how cute the tiny deer was. The mother deer decided to teach her offspring a lesson too, and she hit the little fellow with her hind foot. When she kicked him, he scooted along on the ground and landed flat on his tummy under a bush right near the road. I eased the car forward very slowly and stopped when we were only a few feet from the little guy. Its ears were laying flat against its head. Its eyes were wide open and it was barely breathing. The fawn's color blended in so closely with the surroundings, we had to look hard to see it.

As we watched the baby fawn, here was my opportunity to give a lesson in nature study right at its very best. I told my children about how we should treat wild baby animals. That we should never try to pick them up and bring them home because they nearly always die. That we should watch them closely, enjoy them and then go away and let them alone. Also, that sometimes a mother animal will fight if her babies are bothered.

One time my son, Don, was with me in the woods when we came upon two bear cubs. My black terrier scared them up a tree. I pointed out that we should never try to capture one of the cute little cubs because mamma bear just can't stand to hear one of her babies cry. Don't ever get between a mother bear and her cubs because she can slap awful hard.

One of our best experiences with an animal was when we acquired a baby porcupine. As I mentioned before, the Forest Service encouraged all its employees to kill them whenever and wherever they were spotted. Corbett Smith and his nephew were cutting wood just off the Obenchain Road about 3 miles west of Butte Falls. His dog, Pete, was an experienced hunter when it came to dealing with the quilled porcupine. Corbett heard Pete barking downhill from where they were working. His nephew, Jerry, ran down to see what the dog had treed.

Pete was running in circles around a small pine tree, just about to go nuts with excitement. Perched on a limb near the top, was a small, black, furry looking animal. It was a baby porcupine. Jerry hollered for Corbett to come and look at the little fellow before he shot it.

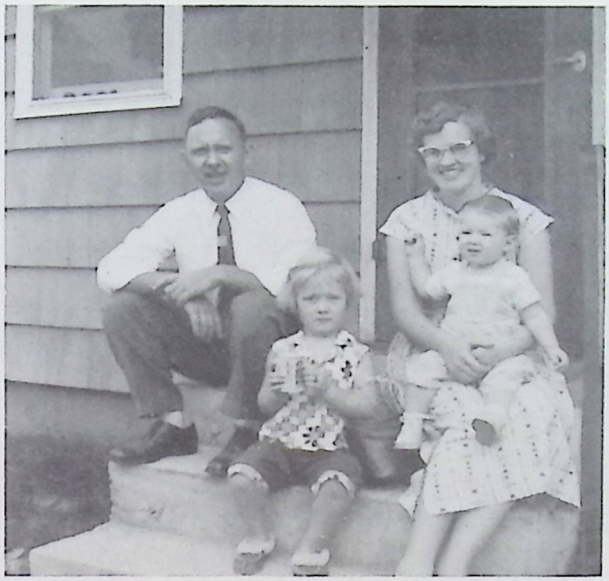
The old man had heard that porcupines make good pets if a person got them when they were little. He took a heavy paper bag with him when he went to take a look. The tree was about 4" in diameter at the ground level. The best way to capture the porcupine would be to chop the tree almost off and let it fall slowly. That way maybe they could shove him off the limb into the paper bag closer to the ground.

Jerry dashed back and got the axe. Meanwhile, Corbett got a glimpse of the mother porcupine as she disappeared under a ledge of rock. Jerry came back quickly and started to hack away at the tree trunk. When it was almost chopped in two, Corbett had Jerry push the small tree over slowly while he stood under the baby animal. About four feet from the ground, the little guy lost his toe-hold and fell. Corbett was holding the open bag directly under it. It fell into the bag and began to squirm around. The two people pulled out for home right after that with only half a pickup load of wood. Corbett would have to build a pen for their catch and find out how true it was that porcupines make good pets. They kept the little animal around for about two weeks. It would drink milk and eat some bread-scraps but never did seem friendly. Finally the new sort of wore off for Jerry,and Corbett had to be the care taker, which soon got old.

Dick Bower, the Camp 2 smoke-chaser, was very interested in the little porcupine and had asked Corbett if he could have it. Of course he was more than glad to give it away, because sooner or later they would have to dispose of the unfriendly animal.

Dick and Erma had a little girl whose name was Nancy. She must have been around a year-old. Anyhow, she thought that the baby porcupine was about

the finest thing that ever happened. Dick showed her the sharp quills, which really didn't mean too much to her at the time; but she did know it was fun to watch the little animal climb a tree. Dick built an enclosure around a small pine tree. They put dog food in the pen and also scraps of bread and lettuce. The porcupine finally realized that every time some one came by they generally brought something good to nibble on. Dick and Erma decided to name him Freddy.



Left to right – Dick, Nancy, Erma and Lance Bower

Don and Tricia were eves-dropping on the Forest telephone one day and found out about Freddy. From then on, Bea and I were pestered about taking a run down to Camp 2 and having a look-see at Nancy's new pet. One evening just after an early supper, we headed toward Camp 2 which was 26 miles away. We drove through the old Cat Hill Burn on the west slopes of Blue Rock. That was always a good place to hunt porcupines at night. We have killed as many as six in a three mile stretch of road, hunting in that area.

It seemed sort of odd how one minute we might be killing porcupines, big and little, and the next minute admiring a porcupine who was surnamed Freddy, a delight to the Bower Family.

I killed two huge porcupines on the way to Camp 2 that night. They were close enough to Medco property to collect a dollar for each of their noses. Dick and Erma met us as we drove up. We all walked out to see Freddy. Dick got a slice of bread to coax him down from the tree top. Freddy was a cute little ball of black hair with shiny white, black-tipped quills protruding. Dick started calling him by name. Freddy jumped when he was awakened, then began to move around. He made a faint humming sound as he descended the tree. Once on the ground, he meandered over to the fence and accepted a small piece of the bread with his mouth and one paw. To the delight of the children and the old folks too, Freddy nibbled at the bread as he turned it over and over in his

little paws. When he downed the last crumb, he dropped down on all fours and begged for more. Freddy was the center of attraction until dark. The little guy was no doubt so full of food, we wondered if he would ever be able to pull himself back up to his perch in the pine tree.

We always had a lot of fun when the two families were together. It was around 10:00 p.m. when we headed back to Lodgepole to prepare for the next day.

A few days went by and Dick called me on the telephone and asked if I would like to have Freddy. They were going to move into Butte Falls and didn't have any place to keep him. Of course we would be delighted to acquire such a pet. Dick and Erma were coming up to visit us and would bring him with them.

Freddy amazed me to no end. He loved to romp with our cat and dog. They would roll and tumble on the front room floor or out in the yard. Freddy would hug the cat and swing him back and forth trying to keep the sharp hind claws from scratching his belly. When he couldn't stand it anymore, he would drop the cat and run as fast as he could only to be bowled over by the dog. I never pulled a quill from Freddy's two buddies nor did the kids get stuck with the porcupine's quills.

Freddy liked to be petted, but he was one animal you didn't dare rub the wrong way. He loved to ride in my smoke-chaser car. I would roll the window down on his side so he could hook his right front leg over the door and lean out like a dog would do.

It was an unusual sight to watch Don, Tricia and Janna walk down the trail toward their play area or across the pasture with the dog, Snoopy, in the lead and Freddy waddling along behind, humming to himself. When Freddy got tired, the children took turns packing him; but being hand-fed and eating constantly, he got to be too heavy for them to lug around. Don took a pasteboard box, cut a hand-hold on each side and two could share the burden of carrying Freddy.

The pet porcupine almost spoiled it for us to go porcupine hunting anymore because he was so loveable. In fact, if the children had it their way, we just wouldn't kill anymore porcupines because they were Freddy's relatives.

Freddy was the delight to everyone who stopped by. He spent most of his sleeping time under an old abandoned cattleguard, which was made of large poles. That fall when we left Lodgepole for the winter, I built a big cage out of chicken wire with a house at one side. That was Freddy's home until we moved back to Lodgepole the next summer.

Freddy was two and a half years old when we lost him. He chewed a hole in the cage and got out. I suppose someone shot him and sold his nose to Medco. He looked just like any other porcupine except maybe a little bigger. He tipped the scales at over 45 lbs.

Jesse Walker and Freddy

CHAPTER 10

FIRST REMOTE OUTHOUSE

AND THE WONDERFUL HIGH COUNTRY

About the 8th of July, I started packing heavy pre-fab toilets and garbage pit covers to back country campgrounds. It was necessary to install some sort of sanitary facilities where camps were getting lots of use. Sometimes in Seven Lakes Basin there would be forty or fifty head of pack and saddle stock at one time, which meant quite a number of people. It wasn't uncommon for five or six people to use just one pack animal and spend two or three days at a time at a campground.

I made a special carrier for the toilets, a simple means to hold the heavy bundles of components on the mule until I could lash it down. Same way with the pit covers. Tom, being a big mule, had the honors of packing the first toilet and Dillon packed the first garbage pit cover. We left Lodgepole about 8:00 a.m. and headed for Alta Lake. Tom's load was the heaviest we had ever worked with - about 300 pounds. He was a stout mule and packed the cumbersome load eleven miles. Luckily there weren't any yellow jackets, and the snow was nearly gone at Alta Lake. Tom bumped his load against a stump once and nearly pulled the whole works off. The pack was loosened up and was heavy on one side. I fixed it up by adding about a five pound rock on the light side, and we made it on to Alta Lake okay.

The really bad part about all this was that I had to dig the holes and install the two facilities and spend the night and finish up the next day. Dillon had to carry my bed roll, food for me and oats for the stock too.

Alta Lake, like I mentioned before, is one of the most beautiful lakes in the Seven Lakes Basin, even though it is up on top of a mountain above the main basin. The lake is deep and full of fish. Before dark, I gathered a lot of wood and built a fire in a nice sheltered spot on the side of Violet Hill, not too far from the lake. There is a grassy glade at the north end of the lake where the stock would have something to eat besides oats. Being able to live like this, I reckon it wasn't too bad to dig a couple of holes and do a little construction work.

It felt so good to me to sit there near the lake and eat supper before dark. My dog was nearby and the horses and mules were eating oats near the timber where it was easy to shovel out a shallow hole to dump the oats in. With a long lash rope stretched between two trees, it was easy to hang the saddles up so deer couldn't reach the cinches and leather. A canvas tarp tossed over another rope made an excellent shelter to spread my bed roll. The sides were pulled out and held down by rocks. One end was pulled together with a string run through the grommet holes to hold it. The open end faced my campfire. Boy, was this living! I lay there and watched the fire for a long time in deep thought.

Lodgepole house, Dillon mule, Bud and Gordon Jesse Walker

It must have been around 11:00 p.m. before sleep finally won out. My boots came off hard but in another minute or two I snuggled down for the night and went to sleep immediately.

Morning always comes too soon. The chilly air caused me to move around fast to get a fire going. The sun came up quickly and helped a lot toward getting me away from the camp. After breakfast, I started my project. By noon there was a neat looking little toilet wedged between four trees and a pit cover constructed over a five foot hole. It seemed rather odd to see the little building there, back in the high country so many miles away from civilization.

I ate lunch, saddled up and headed down the trail, looking ahead to another adventure. Hard telling what my next pack trip would be like. I rode through the gate at Lodgepole and of course was greeted by all the stock that didn't get to make the trip with us. By the time I reached the corral, my kids were all hanging on the hitching rail shouting questions at me and eager to hear the stories they knew would be coming.

One Monday morning Doug Finch drove into Lodgepole for follow-up training on smoke-chasing. Also he brought quite a bunch of stuff to be packed in to Devil's Peak the next day. We unloaded the pickup and put most of it in the saddle-room, which was rat proofed. The rest of the day we spent reviewing my duties as a firefighter and assistant in training other men. Doug didn't like it too well not being able to go with me on pack trips like he used to do.

Tuesday morning was beautiful. I packed up and headed out by 7:00 o'clock with Dillon carrying the load. My mule seemed to want to get going up the trail. I rode old Bud, my saddle horse. Snoopy was barking with excitement. There were oats for the stock and a can of dog food in one of my saddle bags. My lunch was in the other. It would take at least fourteen hours on the trail, in the saddle, unless there was trouble.

The first four miles of gravel road went smoothly with no change in scenery until we crossed the bridge over Nichol's Creek, hit the trail and started a steady climb toward the Cascade Divide.

As the trail went up,the timber types changed. Douglas-fir trees with a diameter of over six feet and over a hundred feet tall bordered the trail. There were white fir, white pine and giant sugar pines along with several other species of trees and brush.

The trail skirted an old burn where the trees had grown from ten to forty feet high since the fire. The farther along the trail we went, the higher the elevation. At 4,000 feet Shasta fir were dominant. The small Shastas, also called silver tips, are commonly used for Christmas trees. Farther up, the mountain hemlock and smaller Shasta firs grew together. On the high ridges and peaks, white bark pine and mountain hemlock grew, stunted because of the constant battle for survival against the weather.

At Frog Lake we stopped for a short rest and to get a drink. The pack was riding good and wasn't too heavy. If time didn't fly by so fast, it would be nice to unpack here, tie the stock and walk around to a spot away from the trail, peel off my clothes and go swimming. On these hot days it would have certainly been refreshing.

After Frog Lake, the trail cuts through rock dikes and tops out on the ridge where I could look across and see the lookout on Devil's Peak, where Neil was waiting for me to bring his mail from home. I kept his letters and checks between two pieces of plywood in my saddle bags so nothing would get damaged.

In another hour, I climbed down out of the saddle and greeted Neil, who was always glad to have company. As I unpacked, Neil went over his list to see that everything he had ordered was there. Just for kicks, Neil said he had ordered some fresh fruit and a watermelon. They were just as pretty when they arrived by pack mule as they were when I bought them at the store. I always encouraged the people who had to live in the high country to order anything they wanted. It didn't make any difference what it was. With special boxes and containers, it was easy to pack the perishables they might want me to bring in. It seemed good to eat my lunch on time at Devil's Peak for once, and share the beauty of the country with my friend Neil.

Once more, the mule was loaded and we hit the trail about two hours earlier than usual. Instead of the regular route home, I rode south down the Divide to a new trail that was under construction. The work had been held up by finances and ended at the foot of a long shale slide just south of Shale Butte. From here to Hemlock Lake, it was about three miles. When we dropped off the trail and headed toward Hemlock, we were truly getting off the beaten path.

Riding down the gradual slope covered with shale rock leading a pack string sounded like walking over a lot of china plates the way it tinkled. Bud picked his way along the shale rock and dropped down through some stunted mountain hemlock. If he went wrong, we would have to back track because there were several small cliffs with steep slides between them. There was only one of these slides that we could make it down to a bench above Hemlock Lake. We were lucky to find the place because the country is so rough and covered with thickets of trees and brush.

A dark gray outcropping showed up through the trees as we approached the cliff. It ran around the hill for two hundred yards with steep ground at each end. The center fifty feet of the cliff had fallen away creating a dirt and rock slide about a hundred and fifty feet down. With no hesitation my horse dropped down the slide with the mules coming down, one on either side of him. It was almost like being in a free fall as we slid down between the two cliffs to the bench below.

I rode out to the edge of the bench and beyond, down to a beautiful little pond. It was nestled in the trees like a set in a ring. The fresh water pond is about twenty feet deep and only seventy or eighty feet across and perfectly round. Talk about an isolated swimming hole! A packer or hiker could go swimming here most anytime and never have to worry about a swim suit. If only I had a little more time. A person could camp here for days and no one would ever come along.

It was about half a mile on downhill to Hemlock Lake, another beautiful little gem in the wilderness. This one covers about fifteen acres. In the fall of the year I have often seen ducks and geese on the lake and some of them nest here. Beyond me were about seven more miles of trail before we came into the Parker Meadows Road at Big Ben Creek. Near the lake, I stretched out on the ground and soaked up a little sunshine. The stock enjoyed a rest as they grazed at the lakeside. Soon we hit the trail and headed for Lodgepole, fourteen miles away.

As I rode down the long trail, the sun got lower and cast long shadows over the country. It was just like songs you hear and stories you read. I was really riding into the sunset and watched the sun sink slowly behind Rustler Peak. It was perfect as the daylight slowly turned to darkness.

The day after my long trip to Devil's Peak and Hemlock Lake was a tough one. There were two toilets and one garbage pit cover to pack into the Seven Lakes Basin. Tom and Dillon packed the toilets and Smokey packed the pit cover. I had learned a couple of things that should help keep the big loads on. For one thing, it took seventy feet of rope to hold one of those toilets on a mule. A nail or two in each side of the pit cover held the rope in place. Also, I rebuilt the carriers for the toilets. With the added experience, todays trip should be a little easier. Doug helped me lift the heavy bundles up on the carriers, then I lashed them in place. If a mule ever lost a toilet, to reload it by myself would almost be impossible.

The trail seemed twice as long today. The mules had to rest often because their loads weighed about three hundred pounds each. Going uphill was a lot easier than going from the summit down to Cliff and Grass Lakes. Except for minor things not worth mentioning, the trip from Lodgepole to the ridge overlooking Seven Lakes Basin was almost trouble-free.

After a short stop to tighten up britchen straps so as to hold the heavy loads back while going downhill, we worked our way toward Alta Lake Junction. Near a small ledge of gray rock, a yellow jacket nest came to life. Dillon snapped a britchen strap the first time he attempted to kick. He left the trail, then Tom came by the nest of bees. He put me in mind of a big fat duck running under a chicken coop. As for Smokey, she was almost past the nest before they hit her in full force.

There wasn't anybody standing still when the bees first struck. Bud took off in a hurry when Dillon left the trail. Tom ran past Smokey and almost pushed the old gal over the bank. He caught up with me and slowed down. Dillon worked his way back to the trail trying to catch up. He didn't get slowed down before he bumped Tom in the rear end with a corner of his load and caused him to lunge ahead. When the mules collided, buckles and little pieces of strap flew in every direction.

At Alta Lake Junction, we pulled up for some major repair work. A leather string or a piece of wire here and there and a little rope put things back in shape. It was a long hard struggle, but finally we made it down to Cliff Lake, where one toilet would be set up. I unloaded it in record time and continued on to Grass Lake toward the north end of the Basin.

At Grass Lake the trail crew had dug the holes necessary for the pit cover and toilet. They would be along later in the week to set them up. I wrestled the bundles around and stacked them under some trees. As a reward for the overworked mules and horses, we went out near the lake where the grass was tall and sweet. I pulled off their saddles and let them roll and scratch their backs. Smokey and Bud were tied up with a couple of long lash ropes. I took a brush from my saddle bags and brushed the mules' backs good and checked for bruised and sore spots. While the stock rested up, I threw my saddlebags over my shoulder and went down by the lake to stretch out and eat my lunch. My watch said it was 3:00 in the afternoon, but I didn't mind letting the mules rest up until about 5:00 before we hit the trail for home.

A mule rarely gets stung by yellow jackets from the same nest twice. We made good time getting out of the Basin; but as soon as we got near the small gray rock cliff where the bees nest was, Dillon and Tom stopped about forty feet away and flopped their big, long ears back and forth and pointed them toward the hot spot. They left the trail, working their way up a steep bank. They went above the cliff and on down to the trail on the other side. The horses speeded up some with my help and moved past the bees nest, catching up with the mules at the summit.

The sun went down as I rode toward it, and we were heading into the sunset again. To me it was a most wonderful experience to have a job like this. The hours were long and hard and the pay didn't correspond. There were no thanks or gratitude from any of my superiors that was noticeable for the long days I worked as a packer; but one thing for sure, my reward was with me all the time, like right now. A beautiful night to ride in with my saddle horse, my pack stock and my dog. You just couldn't measure this in dollars. The only one that really knew such joy was my boss, Doug Finch.

At Lodgepole, I gave Doug a call even though it was late, and asked him to send a man up to Blue Rock Saddle and help me load the mules. He asked about the day's progress and lent a little advice for the next day. I would be taking in two more toilets to Blue Canyon

Claude Curtis met me at Blue Rock Saddle at 9:00 o'clock the next morning. We hauled two pre-fab toilets to the trailhead. Tom and Dillon would have to carry the heavy loads to Island Lake, six miles to the east. Each bundle was four feet wide and eight feet long. The best way to load the heavy, cumbersome, hard-to-handle bundles was to stand them on edge about three

feet apart so a mule could be led between them. If the mule would stand still long enough, the load could be put on and tied down in about ten minutes.

Claude and I lugged the bundles to open ground, stood them on edge and propped the things up. Dillon was the first one to load. He walked between the two bundles and stood there for a moment, then jumped over the top like a cat. Claude led him back between the bundles and he jumped over the other side. Dillon wasn't about to be saddled with another contraption like that. He hadn't forgot the hard day he had packed the last toilet. Dillon won the first round.

Claude brought Tom between the two bundles, expecting him to jump over like Dillon had done. Tom didn't object. In a few minutes the load was on and tied securely. Now for Dillon. He walked between the bundles and started to jump, but didn't. Claude and I worked fast and got one side up and anchored. The other side was hoisted on the carrier before Dillon tried something else.

Immediately after the mules were loaded, I took off down the trail toward Island Lake. It is a half a mile to Round Lake, which lays on a bench above Blue Lake. The loads rode good that far, and it was about another half a mile to Blue Lake and level going for quite a ways then.

Yellow jackets show up in the most unpredictable places. A squirrel hole about a foot from the trail had a nestful of the little yellow bees. They were riled up before we ever got near the nest because of the vibrations caused by the stock walking along on the porous pumice soil. My horse was past the nest before I noticed the swarming mass. Both mules got stung bad and caused a run-away that was hard to believe. We were half-way to Blue Lake before the mules stopped. What a mess! The loads were crooked. Dillon broke his lash rope when he caught it on a tree limb. Tom ruined another leather strap or two. I got down and looked at the damage. My first notion was to cut the lash ropes and leave the toilets where they fell, but I knew the Ranger would just about skin me if the toilets were not delivered to Island Lake. A half hour later, the mules were shuffling along, with their loads back straight again. With a little luck, we might make it.

It was about one o'clock by the time we saw the blue waters of Island Lake between the trees. At the south end of the lake I unloaded both mules. One toilet was left here and the other one would have to be taken to the north end of the lake, about a mile up the Skyline Trail. After an hours rest, free of the heavy loads, I divided the remaining toilet between the two mules and continued on to our final destination.

Of all the pack trips I ever made, and the things my mules had to carry, the toilets were, without a doubt, the most mule-killing loads ever. From here on, something had to be done. By the time we got home, I'd have it figured out.

After a days rest, it was time to take two garbage pit covers into Blue Canyon country. One would be installed at Blue Lake and the other at Meadow Lake. It took quite awhile to ride the twelve miles from Lodgepole to the trailhead of the Schoolmarm Trail. It was seven or eight miles from there to the first lakes in Blue Canyon.

My lumber carriers had been perfected now to the point where the boards stayed on until they could be lashed down. Today I dreamed up two different ways to hold things on and maybe I'd stumble onto the best hitch yet.

The Schoolmarm Trail was the old route to Blue Rock Lookout before the first road was built up through the Cat Hill Burn. The road had washed out and was too rough to travel with a big truck loaded with stock. Most of this season, supplies would have to be brought in by pack mule to the lookout and to supply recreation and trail crews at the south end of the district. The trail starts uphill immediately from the road and follows a draw for about half a mile. Schoolmarm Creek had only a trickle of water in it. It had steep banks, which indicated floods during the spring runoff of rain and melting snow.

When we crossed the creek, there was a bees' nest tucked neatly up under some protruding tree roots hanging over the trails edge. Yellow jackets attack horses and mules viciously and stick tight, stinging again and again, causing utter chaos. I'll say one thing. It was a good way to test the two new hitches I was trying out. Neither one lasted longer than it took me to put them on. Dillon kicked and bucked for several minutes. Tom laid down to roll, fell over a five foot bank and landed on his feet like a cat. The shock of the sudden drop-off caused momentary hesitation, then he laid down in the creek bed and proceeded to kick and roll.

With my saddle horse tied up at a safe distance, I caught Dillon and helped knock the little yellow bees off his hide. Tom came trotting over to where we were and kicked some more. There were two or three bees still sticking to him on the inside of one hind leg. He stood still and I scraped them off with a stick. The mules really suffer when a bee's nest explodes and hundreds of the stinging insects attack them.

Both mules were unsaddled and rubbed down with a rough stick. It took quite awhile for the yellow jackets to settle down because Dillon's first kick had dislodged half the nest and it fell into the trail. Lumber was retrieved by hook and crook without getting stung. My new hitches weren't much for holding lumber in place. I repacked and headed for Blue Canyon and used the hitch Britt had taught me.

Schoolmarm Trail was built through tall timber. Some of the largest Shasta red fir in the country grew here. Near the top of Blue Rock Mountain, it cut across open glades with lone trees here and there. The view was beautiful. Visibility couldn't be better. I could see mountain peaks for a hundred miles. On the way down to Blue Lake we hit another nest of yellow jackets, but the spooky mules got down the trail at a great rate of speed and never lost their loads. Any place along the trail where we had stirred up a bees' nest before, the mules would always stop the next trip by, look things over and go around the spot, even after snow had covered the trail in the fall of the year.

Down in the canyon I left one pit cover at Blue Lake and one at Meadow Lake, then ate my lunch under the trees at the south end of the meadow. Fish jumped beyond where my horse and two mules were cropping the tender sweet sedge and red top grasses from the lake's edge.

With the pit covers delivered, we headed out of Blue Canyon. I looked back at the great expanse of country covered with tall timber, which would never be touched by a human hand. Two of the many lakes and ponds were in plain sight. Fish and game birds live and thrive there for our enjoyment.

Packing for the recreation crew was quite a job. There were so many people visiting the back country lakes that garbage and tin cans were being

strewn around every place. Where camp sites were close to the water's edge, cans and bottles would show up in the lakes. Some people do not use any judgement at times and make it rough for everyone else. It was necessary for the Forest Service to dig deep garbage pits and cover them with heavy redwood covers. Hopefully, the people would use the pits and cut down or maybe eliminate the disposal problem.

More pit covers had to be packed in to the Blue Canyon Lakes. It would take several trips to finish the job. The pit covers were easy to pack. The weight was exactly the same no matter how they were loaded. The load rode high on the sides of the mules, therefore, they could travel better. One of my trips would be to take two pit covers to Island Lake. There was a 40% lightning prediction the day we went up the trail with those two pit covers. Tom and Dillon were struggling up the Red Lake Trail following Sundee, the bay saddle mare. Each horse took its turn packing me up and down the trails of the beautiful high country.

The Red Lake Trail starts from Wickiup Forest Camp on the Parker Meadows Road. The first two and a half miles are steep and rough. Beyond that, the trail cuts along a hillside through lots of lava dikes and finally reaches the Skyline Trail three miles north of Blue Canyon. The first time I led my mules over the Red Lake Trail was at night. There were two mules and one horse loaded down with fire-fighting equipment. It took from 10:00 at night until 3:00 in the morning to reach Red Lake. We met a twelve man fire fighting crew on the banks of Red Lake.

Thunder storms come up quite often during the hot summer months. Generally storms originate southeast of the Cascades and come right up the divide, then play out someplace north of Crater Lake. Today I was headed straight into a lightning storm. When the Skyline Trail came into view, the first rumble of thunder cut loose due south of me. Within a half an hour the storm was getting close and being around horses and mules with a storm overhead is dangerous living.

We made it to a large patch of stunted hemlock and lodgepole pine. Quickly I got down and tied the stock to small trees; then grabbed my saddle bags and hightailed it down the trail about a hundred yards and crawled up under the dense foliage of a small hemlock. To get under a big tree or near a rock ledge might be worse than being with the stock. Lightning may strike anyplace, but a large tree or most anything above ground-level could act as a lightning-rod and pull in a bone-shattering lightning strike.

My dog snuggled up next to me, frightened because of the flash of lightning and clatter of the thunder. The little trees' boughs almost made a water-proof roof. It made a dandy place to eat my lunch while the storm was in progress. Sandwiches, hot coffee and cake for dessert was a picnic in the forest for sure. Not too many people were so lucky as to enjoy it like me and my dog were at that most precious moment.

The storm lasted about an hour. The mules turned their tails to the wind and waited. After it passed over, the sun came out now and then; but not enough to do much good. Me and my dog walked toward the mules and Tom hee-hawed like he was making fun of me for running off and leaving him all alone.

At Red Lake, I left one pit cover for the recreation crew to install. We continued on to Island Lake where the crew was waiting. After the load was taken off Tom, I tied the stock up and ate supper with the crew. They fed me eastern brook trout. After supper and a short visit with the men, I saddled Sundee, tightened the cinches on my mules and hit the trail for Lodgepole.

Left to right – Don, Leslie, Tricia, Tracy and Janna
Lodgepole Hitching Rail

The wonders of the wild are a joy, and the smell of forest vegetation after a summer rain was so sweet. As we left the Skyline Trail and headed down the Red Lake Trail, I wondered if any sleeper fires had cropped up yet. If one showed any sign of smoking, no doubt it would be my fire if Rustler Peak spotted it. We topped out on a little rise and stopped long enough to call in on my Forest Service radio. There were no fires as yet so it looked like maybe it would be a quiet night ahead.

My trip back to Lodgepole was as uneventful as walking across the horse pasture on a lazy hot summer day. There wasn't hardly anything to make it worth while, except the storm - and that hadn't lasted long.

When a pack trip was made, usually there was trouble that could hardly be described. Once in a great while, I would ride along for eight or ten hours during which time twenty or thirty miles would pass beneath my horses feet. Not a single disturbing thing would take place. My eyes would close, believe it or not, and the only thing that would wake me was when my horse stepped in a hole or stumbled over a tree root.

Pack trips like that caused me to ride in with a chip on my shoulder. It made me grouchy and irritable. In fact, it seemed to me like the day's ride was a total loss. Today had been one of those times.

CHAPTER 11

NIGHT TIME IN THE FOREST

The long summer evenings at Lodgepole are hard to describe. It's so peaceful and quiet in contrast to the noise of automobiles and the hubbub of city life; and yet as you sit and listen, the forest is quite noisy. At sundown the first thing you notice is the tiny gnats – the no-see-ums. They come from nowhere, run a person ragged for about an hour and then disappear because the temperature has to be about a certain degree, not too hot - not too cold for them.

The horses and mules could be heard down at the corral walking around and now and then they would get into a kicking, squealing fight. A deer would go bounding off through the timber and hoot owls would call back and forth to each other. The Great Horned Owl will make your hair stand on end until you get used to him. Down the creek toward the river, an old coyote and her pups would start howling and yapping soon after dark. Their sharp voices split the night air and give you a feeling of living right in the center of the wild. Other sounds and noises included frogs, crickets and a lot of things I couldn't identify. It was sometimes hard to figure out if the sounds were being caused by something, or if they just happened.

One time I was sitting on the front porch enjoying the feel of the evening. It was way after dark. I heard a noise out beyond the barn in the timber which sounded like someone snapping twigs, then small limbs and finally it developed into a crunching crackling roar and ended with a loud thud which fairly shook the ground around me.

I took a compass shot in-the direction the noises came from, and the next day went to see what had happened. It was a big snag about five feet through and over a hundred feet tall. At the ground level, the wood had rotted away and the snag was too weak to hold up the weight that towered overhead. It went down all by itself at that moment. Dried-out snags may fall at anytime.

On the trail, night sounds are even more mysterious. As daylight slowly turns to darkness, the sounds of the day-time birds and animals become quieter. The noise-makers are going to roost or hunting burrows and nests. It seems to me there is always a lull between day and night from the black forest. The birds of the night begin to fly and call out to one another. Night animals are roaming around and they cause unrest in the pack string. The mules get a little jumpy, but they enjoy the cool of the evening and they seem to travel better. It is a wonderful experience to ride along the trails at night, looking at the moon and stars above. I often felt that many a person would pay money to be riding in my saddle at night. But this was something that money can't buy - the thrill of doing something that has existed since mankind first started riding horses; and here I was right in the middle of it.

One night I rode down the trail leading four head of pack stock. We were

headed toward Lodgepole after a hectic day. The moon was high and so bright it was nearly like daytime. It was fifteen minutes past eleven p.m. The trail went through an old burn for about a mile. It followed a ridge nearly all the way across, except for the last hundred yards. There, the trail dropped off the ridge down into a sharp canyon and switch-backed to a lower level. When we entered the edge of the burn, it was so bright and pretty I pulled up to rest awhile and just sat, looking at the sky. Northeast of me a star streaked across the sky leaving a trail of fire behind it. Due west was another one that went streaking across the heavens. While I sat looking upward, there were six stars that moved in different directions across the sky. It was beautiful.

The moonlight reflected off snags and stumps. I saw an object up ahead that seemed different. It looked tall like a huge man and seemed to have one arm reaching upward like he wanted me to stop. I sat there trying to figure out what it really was; and after watching the thing for a couple of minutes, it started to move around. It looked like it would go up and down, then move from side to side. It was hard to figure out what to make of it.

I finally realized that the horses and mules weren't excited at all and spurred my horse and rode toward it. The "thing" was only a tree with the top cut out and one limb had grown out and turned up. It is easy to get yourself spooked on a moonlit night.

Coming home from the high country, I always rode into the setting sun, if the trip had been long and hard. Then darkness would settle over me like a mighty cloak. Stars came out and sometimes I watched the moon come up. When it was full, it resembled a ball of fire,and as it rose higher, it cast an eerie light over the country and caused long ghostly shadows to fall across every opening. The shadows would appear to move around. Many a night my tired and weary body was still in the saddle when the same moon disappeared behind the mountains.

I remember one particularly beautiful night in Seven Lakes Basin. After cold-trailing a fire in the late afternoon, I rode up a new trail that went east from Lucifer Mountain toward Devil's Peak. The trail came out in the saddle of a ridge and followed it along the side, up to the lookout on Devil's Peak. It was quite dark and everything seemed wild and different. I was riding Molly, and she traveled along as sure-footed as a goat. Darkness never bothered her at all.

On the ridge top, I sat on my horse and watched the most beautiful sight. A full moon was just beginning to appear and send bright reflections in every direction. High mountain peaks and trees caused weird shadows to appear, and the deep canyons became black bottomless holes, where man would fear to tread. Seven Lakes Basin was somewhere down there to the north and east of me. Devil's Peak and Lee's Peak close by loomed high above, and I could see the dark outline of Pelican Butte and the flat top of Brown Mountain. Southwest stood Mount McLoughlin, the highest mountain peak in southern Oregon - 9,495 feet above sea level. The moonlight shown on the snow streaks down her sides and the snow cap on top. Dome-shaped Luther Mountain looked menacing, and Rustler Peak showed up faintly in the distance through the saddle between Venus and Jupiter.

Many different shapes began to appear as the moon rose higher – a big white-looking tree stump seemed to move around as I watched it. A black

mound looked like it was moving up and down the hillside as I concentrated my gaze on it. As the moon went higher in the sky, the tall timber was silhouetted between me and it. A jagged ridge ran southeast from Lee Peak. If only a big timber wolf would appear on the ridge between me and the moon and fill the canyons with his mournful howl, the scene would be perfect.

I sat there for quite awhile enjoying immensely that God-given peace and beauty. The fresh air kept me alert causing me to think thoughts that would never occur to me anyplace else. The east side of the mountains were quite visible now, and all their features were splashed with moonlight. The mystery of the deep canyons below was such a hair-raising thrill. Any noise coming up from the blackness sounded like huge wild animals prowling around, though it was probably only a porcupine fooling around, causing a small rock slide. Or perhaps it was a bear cub digging in a hollow log. Up toward Shale Butte, a pack of coyotes started yapping. Molly got nervous, and I gripped the saddle a little tighter for a moment. I hated to leave and break the magic spell; but with one last, long, look at the beautiful picture, we dropped off the ridge and down the old trail to camp. Even though this was the long way around, the deep black canyon beckoned me and somehow I couldn't resist it. At camp I took care of Molly and hung up my saddle. It was pleasant to go to bed with my thoughts. I lay there looking at the stars above me, wishing never to leave and ride back to civilization. If only Molly and me could ride the ridges with Tom and Dillon following close behind, we would be enjoying life as it should be - to the fullest.

Living at a guard station is one of the most interesting jobs a man can have. The job is hectic at times, but the excitement and surprises that come along in between the rough times take the edge off the hard part.

Just before midnight one clear summer night, the telephone rang. It wasn't for me, but I listened anyway. It wasn't uncommon for a fire lookout to get up and check his country over for fire after hours. Maybe a fire had been spotted – and just maybe I would get to go to it.

The man on Stella Mountain Lookout, Union Creek District had spotted a strange object. He watched it for awhile and decided it was too bright to be a star. He called Lowell Ash at the Ranger Station. Lowell was eager to see the thing so he got his radio-equipped truck and drove out toward Stella Mountain. As he drove along, he talked to Stella Mountain on the car radio, and the lookout on Bessie Rock heard the transmission on his radio. He hadn't turned it off at sign-off time. When he looked in the direction where the bright object was, he saw what he thought was a flying saucer. He called Doug at Butte Falls in some excitement and that was when my phone rang and I began listening.

We couldn't see a thing from Lodgepole except the sky. The trees were too tall around the station. I turned on my radio and between it and the telephone we had an ideal setup for listening. The two lookouts could see the object and so could Lowell Ash. There was plenty of excitement on the forest because many of the telephones were tied in together and the radios were also on the same frequency. There was great expectancy for a couple of hours and then the bright object disappeared and nothing more came of it.

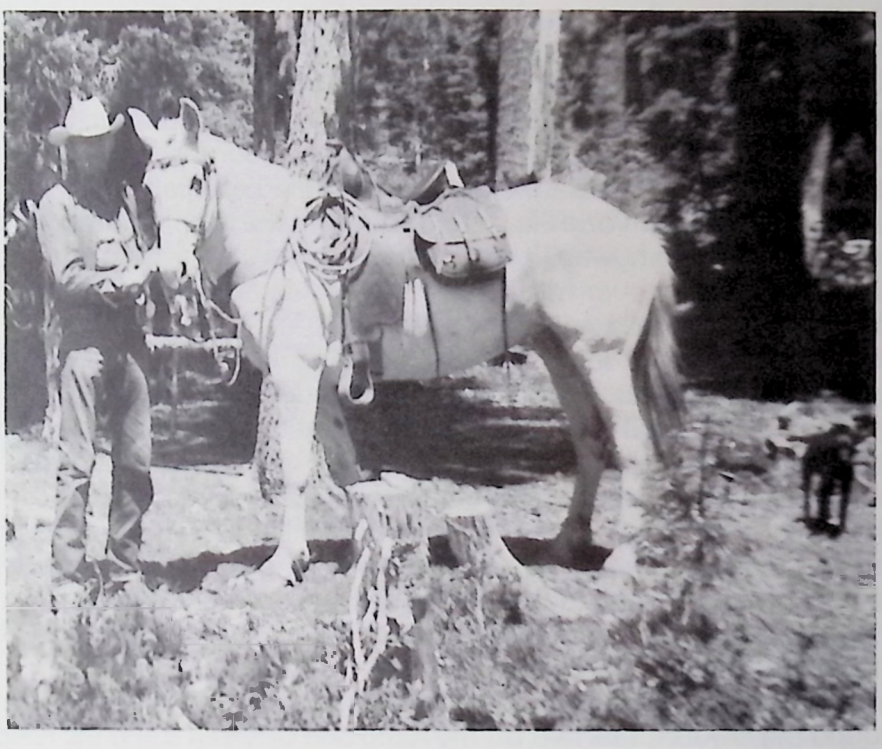
It isn't unusual for a lookout to see a large ball of fire fly through the air on a hot summer night. 1 have never seen one of these fire balls. I don't know what

they could be unless it is a concentration of static electricity.

A man and his wife watched a bright orange ball travel along the Cascade Divide. It went over the Blue Rock area and exploded on the northwest side of Mount McLoughlin. They said the moon was full. A white cloud of smoke appeared after a muffled explosion. They watched the site from Rustler Peak and nothing more showed up.

Two men observed a similar ball of fire on the ridge-top east of the Elk Creek country. It traveled in a northerly direction, toward Elephant Head and Abbott Butte. It was around 10:00 o'clock at night. There was a man on Stella Mountain and George Brown was on Hershberger Mountain. They talked to each other about it on the Forest Service telephone as they watched it move along. They told me that just before it disappeared it got brighter for an instant and then went out like a light.

The life of a man on a remote forest lookout is secluded, but he is never lonely. There is always something happening or he has the feeling that something is about to happen most of the time. For those who don't mind working alone, they generally come back year after year to enjoy that special way of living.



Island Lake – Gordon Jesse Walker, Molly and Snoopy

CHAPTER 12

AIR DROP AT GRASS LAKE

I always scheduled my pack trips several days in advance. That saved me time and trouble from one day to the next unless a smoke had to be chased. Today Doug would ride with me and take only one mule to pack a light load consisting of fence building tools, lunches and a few supplies for the recreation crew. They would meet us at Grass Lake. We would help them get lined out on building a pasture fence there.

The trip in was a nice fast ride, non-stop because of the light-loaded mule. The two-man recreation crew was clearing fence line and preparing for an air drop of wire and posts. The plan was to drop wire and steel fence posts by airplane the next day. With everything ready and a drop area marked, so the plane could see it, we started for home.

We rode out to the lake to water our horses and what we saw there had the stock standing on their hind legs and pawing the air. Tom mule turned tail like a coward and ran for the tall timber as fast as he could, peeking out around a clump of brush. Doug nearly fell off when Sundee reared up. My saddle horse wheeled on his hind legs and tried to run away.

Under the horses feet the ground almost seemed to be moving. There were millions of black frogs about the size of a dime and about four inches deep where we stopped. The frogs had hatched out and were on land about fifty feet from the water's edge. We noticed later that the frogs weren't as thick back away from the lake; but the closer we got to the water, the deeper they were. A solid black mass moving toward the water. Old Tom acted jittery all the way back to Lodgepole.

That evening,Doug called the local weather bureau to get a spot check on the weather for the Rogue River Valley and the Cascade Divide areas. The weather was favorable to air drop the fence material tomorrow. Doug called me on the phone and we made plans to go back to Seven Lakes Basin in the morning.

The night passed quickly. Seems like it's always like that when a man is tired, happy and content. The effort of working with Tom and Dillon was always rewarding and quite conducive to a good night's sleep. I rolled out early and built a fire in the wood cookstove and put on the coffee. The warmth of the stove felt good so early in the morning.

I stepped out on the back porch and listened. It was pitch dark and the air smelled so pure and fresh. There wasn't any wind and not a sound could be heard. I whistled once and still no sound, except the echo of the shrill whistle up the draw. I whistled again and from several different directions the horses and mules responded to my call.

I walked toward the center of the big corral. In a moment the mules and horses were all around me. Tom was always the one who came and stood

directly in front of me and wouldn't leave. He was most always standing in line to get his ration of oats first. It was easy to catch Tom and Dillon, Smokey and two saddle horses, then open the gate and run the others out into the big pasture and give them a couple bales of hay.

Resting at Lodgepole Corral

While cooking breakfast, Janna heard me banging around in the kitchen and got up to keep me company. I fried her an egg and fixed her some toast. She was such a cute little thing in her long gown with blonde hair falling over her shoulders. Her blue eyes danced as she made one comment after another about the things she and Don and Tricia planned to do when they got up. I enjoyed my family very much and Lodgepole was the perfect place to raise them.

At daylight, I saddled the horses and mules and piled eighteen yewwood posts alongside the truck. Doug came in a little before 7:00. I waved at Janna as I drove past the house and headed toward the Seven Lakes trailhead. Once at the trailhead, Doug tightened up his cinch and headed toward Grass Lake, hoping to reach it before the airplane dropped its cargo.

I had built special carriers to haul the heavy yewwood posts on Tom and Dillon. Each post was eight feet long and at least six inches in diameter on the little end. Each mule and Smokey carried six posts - three on each side.

The sun was high by the time I headed up the trail. The two people who were camped at Black Bear Forest Camp never stirred as the stock clattered over the little bridge that crosses Nichols Creek. They were sleeping out in the open under a big fir tree. Birds of the forest were everywhere. Squirrels scampered about and I counted eleven deer in less than a mile. We were making good time and were already near the spring that was about half-way between Black Bear and King Spruce Junction.

The trail passed along under several large white fir trees. A pine squirrel was busy knocking the heavy cones from the tree tops. I pulled up to watch him work. He would push a cone upward until it snapped off,then scamper to another one and snap it loose. He was breaking off a cone about every ten seconds! Cones were landing in the trail and in the brush nearby. Now to figure out how to get past the falling cones without one hitting a mule.

I noticed that he was working first on one side of the tree and then on the other. It depended on which side he worked on whether the cone landed in the trail or in the brush. A cone thumped down in the trail. The next one should go into the brush. I spurred my horse and we dashed up the trail. A big cone fell at just the right time to smack Tom on the rump. He bolted with every ounce of strength he had and rammed Dillon with a couple of yewwood posts. The race was on. Smokey almost expired completely. She ran through a pole patch and yanked her lash rope loose. Two posts tipped forward and stopped her hasty retreat. It took me an hour to get everything patched up and the posts repacked. I had to stop to laugh several times at what happened. I often wondered if Tom thought it was me who had hit him with that cone.

The rest of the trip was okay, except for a couple of adjustments on the pack rigs. When I arrived at the lake, the air drop had already been made. There were muddy rolls of wire stacked around in the meadow. There were two or three bundles of posts sticking out of the mud with just the ends showing. They had dropped most everything free-fall, no parachutes, and a lot of time was spent digging everything out of the mud. One roll of number nine wire had hit a rock so hard no one was ever able to get it unrolled. Another roll is still laying in the timber someplace. Or it may have landed in quicksand.

Doug got the crew lined out building the fence, then he and I headed for South Lake at the upper end of the Basin. At South Lake there was a nice little log cabin, where we kept fire fighting tools cached so there would always be tools available for the trail and recreation crews in the Basin. The cabin was built for the Snow Survey Crew to live in while they were running the snow course in the high country. The Forest Service measures the snow depth three times a year - generally the 30th of January, the 28th of February and the 30th of March. Two men work together on each trip, which lasts about three days. It takes one day to walk in on snowshoes, one day to run the course and one day to walk out.

The snow depth is measured by using a long hollow stainless steel tube that is about two inches, inside diameter. It is divided into three-foot sections. Enough sections are coupled together to reach the ground through the deep snow. Narrow slits along the tube indicate the length of the core (snow inside the tube) when the tube is pulled up. The tube is marked off in inches on the outside to tell the snow depth. It is inserted straight down and twisted as you push downward. The aluminum handle attached to each side of the tube makes it easy to turn. The sharp cutter teeth on the lower end will cut through ice layers and into the dirt below. Then the tube is pulled up bringing a snow core, and hopefully, a little dirt on the lower end. The dirt is carefully removed and the tube, core and all, is weighed and recorded.

The completed operation reveals snow depth, water content, snow density and the amount of new snow and old ice layers. The purpose of the snow

survey is to determine how much snow pack there is in the high country. Irrigation can then be regulated to let surplus water out of dams, or hold it back. Information concerning the snow pack and water content aids the farmers in knowing how to plan their crops. There is much more to it, of course; but that's the main idea.

Doug and I had ridden down the west slopes of the Cascade Divide many times just at sundown. Cool mountain air sets in fast and makes you button your coat and turn up the collar, and pull your hat a little lower. The mules travelled better and so did our horses. It is more beautiful than words can describe. The way the sun disappeared behind the tall trees, casting shadows, then slowly blending with the darkness of night. A thin moon began to show through the trees from over our shoulders, casting ghostly shadows ahead of us as we plodded along down the trail toward home.

The following day was Saturday,which would give me a chance to rest up, unless I had to chase smoke. The horses and mules could eat and stand around in the shade of the barn or under the nearby lodgepole trees switching flies or sleeping. Sometimes a horse or mule would stroll slowly across the pasture to a favorite rolling spot and take a nice dust bath. Each one had his own favorite place to roll. There were several spots which looked like bowl-shaped sand pits about ten feet across with the center about a foot lower than the outside edges. No grass ever had a chance to take root here because the mules kept the dirt stirred up from rolling. My kids loved to play in the loose dirt where they made mud pies.

That weekend several people came by to inquire about fishing and where they could find a good campsite. My family and I were eating lunch on Sunday when a tall, slim elderly lady came to the door. I greeted her and invited her to join us, but she said she shouldn't take the time. She was having car trouble up the road and her husband was waiting in the car. He was ill. The lady wouldn't wait until I could call headquarters and check out with Doug before leaving. She went on back to her husband and the stalled vehicle. I took my smoke-chasing car and went to their rescue.

Their car was an older model that they were using to pull a good sized trailer house. The car had stalled in the middle of the road on a hill. Not being an expert mechanic, it seemed to me if the car was getting gas and a hot spark, it should run. If not, we might have to call for help. The loosened gas line didn't prove a thing because the motor wouldn't turn over to activate the fuel pump. There was no spark at all. We decided to check the battery and found that it was almost completely run down. My car had a new battery that worked fine, and maybe the old folks could at least start their car and drive it to a turnout. Then I could go to town and get them another battery.

My battery started their motor easily and the amp meter showed the generator was charging. It occurred to me that maybe their battery would start my car and use the crank instead of the starter. With the battery in place, a couple of turns with the crank, the motor started. They headed up the road to choose a forest camp, while I would follow along hoping my car generator would charge their battery enough to start their car again.

I opened my car door and started to get behind the wheel; and there before me was a problem all my own. To get my car off the road it was centered right

over a small stump hole, apparently it sheltered a yellow jacket's nest. The car was like a beehive with yellow jackets buzzing around by the dozens. They were coming up through a hole in the floor board. By opening the doors and doing lots of shooing and swatting, most of the bees left or were killed.

The two people made it to Wickiup Forest Camp. We put the battery back in their car and tried the starter. It worked perfectly. They offered to pay me for all the trouble they caused, but I didn't accept. They took the name and address of the Forest Supervisor and I found out later that they wrote and told him how I helped them. It was always a pleasure to give someone a helping hand like that, especially elderly people who were helpless until I came along.

The afternoon of the same day, three carloads of people drove into Lodgepole. They were quite excited. Some of the womenfolks were crying and most of the kids were quite sober. An elderly member of their group had gone fishing early that morning and hadn't showed up when he was supposed to. After getting the details from the group, I called headquarters to let Doug know and to get some men organized to look for the lost man.

As I hung up the phone, our pet porcupine was scratching on the screen door trying to draw someone's attention to get something to eat. On my way out of the house, I picked him up like anyone might pick up a dog or cat and took him out where the people were waiting, and set him down as the amazed people gathered around to get a closer look at such an unusual pet. For the moment they forgot about the poor lost soul they were so worried about and watched as Freddy and our cat rolled and tumbled about on the lawn.

The cattleguard rattled as another car came down the driveway toward the house. As it pulled up, someone recognized a familiar face. It was the lost man. He had run into rough going and had taken it easy because he knew his limitations. After the folks watched Freddy for awhile, they all took off for home, happy that the lost fisherman was safe.

At Lodgepole, it seemed something was happening all the time. The kids came running to the house wide-eyed with excitement. They had constructed a playhouse using burlap sacks and some poles. They put one end up on the corral fence and stretched the sacks over the poles. The corral had been constructed by the CCC's and the corner posts were two feet in diameter. Down through the years the old posts had rotted away until there was only an outside shell holding them together. Don had driven a nail in one of the corner posts to help hold up a part of the structure they were building. It seems that Tricia and Janna did the engineering and planning and Don did the work. The hammering disturbed some inhabitants who were living in a woodpecker hole in the top of the post. The kids said the old corner post was full of bees. Maybe it was a bald hornet's nest.

I went out to have a look and discovered that the kids had run onto a nest of flickers, a large orange and gray bird, sort of like a woodpecker. When we tapped on the post, it disturbed the young birds. They made a loud screeching noise, which sounded very much like hornets buzzing around in the hollow part of the post.

The kids kept close track of their new friends. Finally one day, I reached down in the hole and pulled two little birds out in the open. The kids were delighted. There were five birds in all. Here was another wonderful opportunity

for Don, Tricia and Janna, and even little Leslie to learn about nature firsthand and it gave me another chance to instruct them in the ways of the wild. They could enjoy watching them, but the kids wouldn't kill one or try to keep one as a pet. The forest was their home and they had every right to enjoy it the same way we enjoyed our way of life.

The kids took turns climbing up and peering into the hole and were thrilled to see how fast the birds grew. They saw the birds come out of their nest and stand on the top pole, moving their wings up and down. The two girls made sure our old cat was nowhere around so the birds wouldn't be harmed. Soon the birds began to make short flights from the fence to the barn roof, then back to their nest. Finally they were flying around everywhere with all the other birds of the forest and could no longer be called the "baby birds." They were part of forest wildlife who would be raising families of their own.

There were many things about my job at Lodgepole that meant so much more than dollars and cents. There were opportunities like this that helped me to teach my kids the important things in life. It was something they would always remember, and they in turn, could teach their children someday.

Young Walkers at Lodgepole

CHAPTER 13

TRIP TO HALIFAX BURN

Part of Sunday afternoon was spent getting ready for a trip to the Middle Fork of Rogue River below Halifax Burn, about a fourteen mile drag. It was always a lot of fun riding from Lodgepole to Imnaha with no packs. My wife and kids brought the car with a trailer-load of pack rigging and supplies later. It was eight miles by road and five miles by trail. By taking the stock and things to be packed to Imnaha the day before, it saved a lot of time getting lined out the next day.

On Monday morning I left Imnaha with a garbage-pit cover on Smokey and some trail crew supplies on Tom. Riding up the trail at 7:00 a.m. was quite refreshing. The stock were blowing steam from their nostrils as they strained under their loads. Up Bessie Creek and through Fool's Creek we went. You could hear the roar of the Rogue River in the great canyon below. It was music to my ears. At the trail junction a couple of hundred yards above the river, we would turn right and head east up the river.

I saw a cloud of dust ahead of me on the trail and later found a set of large bear tracks in the dusty tread. The next six miles of trail were nearly level and riding was easy except for a few little wash-outs along the hillside.

It was noon by the time we forded the river to the base camp of the trail crew. I unpacked the stock and pulled the saddle off my horses to give them a rest and planned to take my time for a change, eat a leisurely lunch by the river, and soak up a little sunshine. It was a rare thing to get any rest at all from the beginning of a pack trip until we got back home many hours later.

I shared a sandwich with my dog, who was really hungry after the long trip. Hot coffee always tasted so good out here in the wilds.

The clear river was swift, with deep boiling pools of blue green water; places that looked about a foot or so deep turned out to be five or six feet. A legal sized trout went swimming by and instinctively I tossed a piece of bread into the water. I got the surprise of my life when fish came from every direction to fight over the tasty little morsel. I tossed in another piece and the same thing happened. One big one came clear out of the water and got the whole thing. He was over 18 inches long. My dog even got excited, watching all the activity in the water. My lunch was almost gone before It suddenly dawned on me to try to catch a mess of trout for supper.

It would be simple to do some fishing. All I needed was a fishing pole, a line and hook, which surely the trail crew had. But a thorough search around their camp was useless. There was no fishing equipment. Then I remembered the foreman saying something about leaving It home, as it was only in the way and they never had time to fish anyhow. I knew there just had to be some way of getting at least three of those trout for supper.

There was a safety pin in the cuff of my pants where the seam got ripped

loose during a run-a-way. With pliers, it was easy to fashion something that resembled a fish hook, eye and all. My saddlebags usually contained string of some kind, but all I had was about six feet of copper wire, kept handy to patch rigging on the trail. With a crooked pole, the copper wire and saftey-pin hook and cheese for bait, I started fishing. After several tries, I landed three big trout, about fourteen inches long. Before these were caught, I must have hooked a couple of limits, including one which bent my hook so It resembled a hat pin. In the scramble to land the fish I almost fell in, chaps and all; also managed to lose my pliers and nearly drowned my dog.

While trying to reach the pliers, I started to wade in what looked like shallow water and to my surprise It was waist deep. Good thing no one was watching me struggle to keep my footing and get back on the bank. Staggering around in swift water with bat-wing chaps on makes It difficult to stay on your feet, but I did get the pliers.

The trail crew was happy to see the fish for supper and was glad I brought my fishing outfit. They were surprised to see what the fish were caught with. The copper wire and makeshift hook are part of my collection of souvenirs.

Early next morning I rode up the switchbacks through Hallfax Burn and on out to Solace Cow Camp, which is located just west of the Oregon Desert. At Solace there is a nice cabin used by the cattlemen who run cows on the Hallfax grazing allotment. There is a pasture with a corral in one corner where cattle are held and horses are kept during roundup. My cargo, a garbage pit cover, would be installed by the trail crew.

The trip back to Imnaha was a leisure one; no excitement at all, just another day. Times like this were bad because it seemed like a waste of time if something exciting didn't happen.

At Imnaha I unsaddled the stock and gave them some oats and plenty of hay. I had supper with Corbett Smith, the Imnaha guard, and got him to give me a lift home to Lodgepole.

It was a delight to be back with my family. The kids stood around me, listening to all the new things that had happened. Of course, the fish story was the favorite one of all the stories I told them about that trip.

The lookout on Bessie Rock had been complaining about the performance of his kerosene "cookstove", which was merely three burners fit into a long narrow frame. The solid top had three, four-inch holes for the flame to pass through and hit the bottom of a frying pan or kettle. The old stove had finally refused to light so Doug had bought a new one. I would take it to the lookout the next day. It was still in a wooden crate, and when we carried it out to the corral, it sounded like a crateful of tin cans, the way it rattled. After stuffing a few burlap sacks in around the loose parts, I rolled it across the barnyard to make sure it wouldn't rattle. Dillon was the one chosen to carry the awkward burden to Bessie Rock. Tom packed other supplies. My big black horse, Bud, would carry me 21 miles today.

We left the Imnaha corral and followed a narrow road toward the trail. Dillon was always a few feet behind the lead horse, even though sometimes his lead rope was tied up and he was coming along by himself. It usually took awhile before he could adjust his pace to whatever horse I rode. So Dillon was forced to trot a few feet to put slack in the lead rope. After all the pains taken

to eliminate the rattles in the wooden crate, there was one that didn't show up until It was on the mule's back. It again sounded like a crateful of tin cans and the way Dillon acted, it might as well have been tied to his tall.

I dropped Dillon's lead rope and out through the brush Bud went with Dillon right on his heels. Tom headed back toward the corral in a cloud of dust. Bud ran under an oak tree and liked to have torn off my right ear on a low limb. The mule was trying his best to catch up with me so I could help him out. Bud kept on running because the noisy load scared him. We had a real dandy run-a-way for awhile.

Dillon finally stopped and tried to buck the load loose. This gave me a chance to stop and rescue him. I unpacked him and found the stove part that rattled and stuffed my coat around the loose part, and that worked fine. The stove didn't rattle anymore, but the least little unusual noise would spook Dillon and he ran away twice more before we got to Bessie Rock.

Each time, I would throw the lead rope down and ride like the wind down the trail. Dillon would stop and turn crossways in the trail, then Bud would stop after he was sure he wouldn't get run over. As the dust cleared, Dillon's long ears and the top of his pack would appear above the cloud first, then Tom would slowly and cautiously catch up, hoping things would settle back to normal and wouldn't be quite so nerve-wracking.

When we crossed the Middle Fork of Rogue River, Dillon crossed at the wrong place and had to swim. The water soaked up some of the sacks that were stuffed around the stove and also my coat. From here on, there would be no more rattles for sure.

The trail started uphill soon after we left the river. We crossed little ravines with live streams rushing down the mountains. There were several switchbacks working back and forth and finally I could hear Geyser Springs. The water roars out of the mountainside thousands of gallons a minute, forming a large stream cascading toward the river a mile below.

Bessie Rock Lookout

The trail leveled off some, going around a ridge, which shut off the sound of the river and Geyser Springs. It was quiet except for the sound of a cooling breeze in the tree tops. Two more miles of riding and we headed up the switchbacks above Bessie Creek. It was a three mile ride from there to see the lookout. Bessie Rock loomed in the distance as we worked our way toward It.The young college man was happy to get his new stove as he had already eaten three or four cold meals. It was hard to keep a man on Bessie Rock for some reason or other. They had a lot of stories to tell me when I rode in to deliver supplies. One fellow said he heard a noise in the lookout one night that sounded like it came from the table. He turned his flashlight in that direction just in time to see a big pack rat putting the lid back on the peanut butter after he had made himself a sandwich. He said the pack rat made tracks so big he could lay a quarter over a footprint and still see toe marks around the edge.

A pack rat is a strange animal. Unlike the wharf rat, or the rats you see around sewers and garbage dumps, the pack rat lives in the forest. He builds his nest using hundreds of sticks and limbs. A pack rat nest is built on the ground, generally in a clump of trees, or in a deserted building, a cave, or big hole of some kind. It may be from two to eight feet high. The pack rat will pack off anything it can carry or drag including silverware and other shiny things and especially articles of clothing for its nest. Sometimes it will be packing something and discover another more interesting thing, and leave what he had and take the other goody. That is why he is sometimes called a trade rat. As for looks, he has little beady, bulging eyes and a tuft of hair on his long tall.

We installed the new stove. It was a kerosene burner, but at least it was bigger and much better made than the old one had been. We tried it out by making a pot of coffee. The old stove wasn't worth packing home so we tossed it off the rock a piece at a time and watched as the metal and glass flew to pieces when they hit the rocks over four hundred feet below.

I bade our fire-detection man goodbye and took off down the trail toward home thirteen miles away. With a good horse under me and two faithful mules following behind, what more could I want? Nothing in the world at this moment could make me feel better or happier.

There had been several freezing spells in the high country. Some of the high altitude grass must taste different after a freeze, because the mules liked to linger along the trail and eat. In fact, Tom started lagging behind as soon as we got down in the tall timber. I rode down over a little hill and, looking back, noticed that even Dillon was out of sight too. Here was my chance to have some fun and find out if my mules could track me down if I hid from them.

Old Bud covered a quarter of a mile pretty fast, then we left the trail and doubled back about fifty feet. There was a clump of thick hemlock about a hundred yards across. We went up through thls, clear to the upper edge and I got down out of the saddle and stood by my horse's head and waited.

Soon we heard the mules coming. They had finally lost sight of me and were worried. Down the trail they came at full gallop and went right past where Bud's track left the trail, and on out of hearing. Soon they came back up the trail full tilt and went past my tracks again, but not very far. I watched them, Dillon in the lead and their noses against the ground like two big hound dogs. They were walking along following each track my horse had made, working

their way toward me, smelling the ground and blowing their noses at each track. They were about twenty feet from me when they both looked up at once and stared right at me with their big ears turned my way as if to say, "Thought you could fool us, huh?"

I have since tried to run off from my mules more than once, but there was never a time when I could escape from them no matter how carefully it was planned. It was always good for a laugh. They seemed to enjoy the fun too.

Yellow jackets are a constant menace to a packer. It seemed like every trip now, there were more nests, with an increased number of bees in each one. We hit the switchbacks below Geyser Springs before anything happened, but it was there that my little black dog stirred up a nest of bees above the trail. The mountain is steep and the trail is cut along the slope at a six percent grade.

My dog yipped and then came running down the mountain. There were little yellow jackets sticking to him everywhere, especially between his hind legs! He would bite at the bees between his legs while running at full speed, then turn into a black ball and roll across the trail right on down the mountain. When he got stopped, he ran up to the trail and down it,doing the same thing. He would bite at the bees between his legs without slowing down and roll for a long ways. I couldn't help but laugh. When we reached the river, the dog jumped in until just his head was above water, cooling off the hot spots.

We rode right on past Imnaha and went straight to Lodgepole by trail, just another 5 miles away. My little black terrier rode behind the saddle to rest during the last two hours of the trip.

Easter Sunday at Lodgepole

CHAPTER 14

GEOLOGICAL SURVEY — THREE MULE LOAD

As a Government packer, my trips were many and varied. Other agencies called on me to make a drag now and then. There was a team of Geological Surveyors working on our district running lines and locating section corners. The chief of the party contacted Doug. He wanted me to make a trip from Wickiup Forest Camp to Land Lake. We were to take a three-mule load of supplies and equipment ten miles to a remote place on the Skyline Trail.

The mules got a good days rest and some special treatment. I took a five gallon bucket and filled it almost full of fairly hot water, then added a pound of table salt and stirred until it dissolved. I caught all nine head of stock and gave each one a helping of oats. The water had cooled to luke warm by then and was ready to use. It didn't take Tom long to get used to the warm salt water rub down. He leaned against my hands each time I rubbed along his back like a hog does when you scratch his belly with a corn cob. Dillon was skittish at first, but soon found it was mighty fine treatment. All the horses felt that same way about the special attention. To me, my mules were very special animals. I had more love and respect for them than many a person I have known. They trusted my judgement and I trusted them and they knew it. I felt the same way about the horses.

My trip to Wickiup Springs, three miles off the Parker Meadows Road, was at hand. so at 7:00 a.m. I was in the saddle headed south. John Fuiten met me at the trailhead and wanted to make a trip with me. He was our District Clerk. We travelled empty from there to Wickiup Springs with John riding Smokey in the lead.

There were five men camped in the shelter at the Springs. The structure had been built by the CCCs in the late 1930's. The chief of the party greeted us and told me where to take the stuff. The three pack animals were loaded heavy and high when we rode out of Wickiup Springs and headed east toward the Cascade Divide, four miles away.

The surveyors had two big tents, five large bed rolls, food for several days and what seemed like a lot of junk they could have done without, plus their personal things. It was a challenge to load a mule with different things and try to keep the pack balanced. With the bunch of stuff I picked up here it almost topped the list.

Halfway to the Divide, Dillon smelled a bear and stopped in his tracks. He almost yanked me from the saddle. My horse turned sideways and managed to get the lead rope under his tail. He made a couple of revolutions winding me up in the rope and everything went to thunder. Tom lost his pack completely and stopped. My horse lunged ahead and yanked the rope free from under his tail. John was sitting on Smokey at a safe distance watching wide-eyed and never once thought about his camera. After I repacked, Tom

and adjusted the two other loads, we continued on toward the summit.

On the west slopes of the Cascades there are dozens of small fresh water lakes and ponds for several miles between Crater Lake and Mount McLaughlin. There are a few scattered lakes on the east side, not counting the Sky Lakes group. We rode down past two of the small snow-water ponds, which were filled with beautiful water lillies. The flowers of the lillies were nearly six inches across and the large flat leaves from one plant covered a three foot circle on the water surface. It looked like something someone had planted, but these two little beauty spots were there by the hand of God, to be enjoyed by you and me. The two ponds full of lillies we passed were just a sample of what a person would see if he should leave the beaten path and explore the country.

It was about six miles from Wickiup to Land Lake. It took three hours to make the trip, loaded. We pulled the loads off and put everything in neat piles at a good camp site. We watered the stock and tied them to a tree while we rested and ate our lunches. Land Lake covers several acres and appears shallow at one end with large flat rocks just under the surface, which made an ideal place to bathe. I couldn't see any fish jumping, but I think maybe there were a few over in deep water by the far bank.

It was 3:00 o'clock when we headed back up the trail. I didn't have to worry about the pack stock now, so we stopped at one of the lilly ponds and got a closer look. We by-passed the shelter at the Onion Springs Trail and headed toward Red Lake Trail Junction. On the east slope of Wickiup country there is a huckleberry patch two miles long and three quarters of a mile wide. Huckleberries were the size of the end of my thumb and lots of them. John and I stopped and picked a few and took some pictures. We weren't paying much attention to the sky overhead. There was a lightning storm in progress just south of Fourmile Lake and headed right up the divide toward us. The storm was close enough to hear the rumble of thunder and feel the wind in our faces from the approaching storm.

We quit picking huckleberries and headed for Wickiup Forest Camp, down by the main road. We had about two miles yet to go when the first drops of rain hit us and the thunder was getting loud. The storm came right down the ridge we were on and we knew the lightning was getting too close for comfort. Before we reached the road, the storm cut loose like a cloud burst. I pulled the packs off the mules and tossed them in the back of John's pickup, then threw a pack cover over my saddle to keep it a little dry.

Some people were staying at the Forest Camp when we arrived. They had rigged up a big canvas tarp over the table and the outdoor stove when they heard the first clap of thunder. They saw how wet we were and hollered for us to come on over and get warm by their fire and have a piece of huckleberry pie. We couldn't resist an invitation like that and took them up on their offer. During the next half hour, it rained like it never rained before. The pie and the warm fire took the edge off being wet and miserable. Lightning struck close for awhile, then let up entirely. We thanked the good people for their hospitality. John headed for Lodgepole in the pickup and I rode the six miles by road, taking short-cuts where there were any and made the trip in an hour.

Rustler Peak Lookout recorded a lot of lightning strikes, of which most did not start fires because of the downpour that came with the storm. One hot

strike hit in tall timber about three miles up Sumpter Creek from the Parker Meadows Road. The smoke came up in a long arching column, which indicated a live fire. Howard got a good shot at it with the Osborne firefinder and started his fire report. Another rainstorm moved in over the fire, and when it cleared away the smoke didn't show up anymore. Howard put a mark on the firefinder to indicate where to look and he would check the spot every day until it rained again in the fall. That lightning strike just could be a sleeper fire.

I was prepared to chase smoke day or night and could hardly wait for the phone to ring after the storm and a voice at the other end of the line to say, "Get ready. You have a fire." Morning came and still no smokes materialized from the strikes on Sumpter Creek. I continued with the packing job scheduled for the day.

For many months now I had to ride and pack straight from Lodgepole. My shortest round trips were twenty-six miles to Devil's Peak and Bessie Rock. Most of the trips I rode several miles over graveled roads, unless I could find a suitable shortcut. Road travel is bad for the stock because of the hard surface and the loose gravel.

Our District Ranger, Britt Ash, had the answers to solve a lot of problems for me. One came in the form of a one-and-a-half-ton Dodge truck rigged up to haul four or five head of stock, plus all the pack gear and the stuff to be packed. I could hardly believe my eyes when Doug and Britt brought the truck to me and told me that from now on it was my rig.

The first task at hand was to convince Tom and Dillon it was a good idea to ride in the truck. Doug and Britt helped me load the stock and haul them around some to see what would happen. Britt's strawberry roan mare bit Dillon on the rump. Dillon whaled away and kicked Tom's front feet out from under him and caused him to bang his jaw on the stock rack. The trick was to hold the truck between the ditches when the stock got to fighting. A few short runs to get them used to riding taught me some lessons that helped a lot on my first long haul.

The horses and mules were loaded crossways, their heads facing in opposite directions. If tied short enough, it would be quite a trick for Brownie, the biter, to take a nip at a mule. After loading and unloading the horses and mules a few times, the first day I got them used to it so there would be no trouble to speak of from then on. Tom and Dillon seemed to like to ride. The one other problem I had that made packing rough was the lash hitch I learned when I first started packing. The lash hitch Britt taught me was the one that made my job much simpler. I revised the hitch to suit myself and I use it to this day. I'll never know how in the world I got by without knowing more than I did about mules, but somehow I managed.

CHAPTER 15

THE SUMPTER CREEK SMOKE

By now, 18 days had passed since Rustler Peak Lookout had reported smoke coming up from the headwaters of Sumpter Creek. He had kept close watch every day, especially in the afternoons when the sun got the hottest and everything dried out. His firefinder was marked so all he had to do was to swing it around, line it up with the marks and the firefinder was sighted in on the original spot where he first sighted the column of smoke. He would also scan the area with his high-powered field glasses. This procedure would be kept up until smoke showed up again or until he left the lookout in the fall.

On the 18th day after the storm, at 3:30 in the afternoon, Howard Gear saw smoke on Sumpter Creek. At first it was difficult to detect. Then a small column materialized and went almost straight up. Quickly he compared the reading with the one taken the first time he saw smoke; and sure enough, there was a real going fire in the heavy timber. It was on a southwest slope at the headwaters of the creek and it had the makings of a project fire. The temperature was near 90° in the shade. It was at least three miles from any road. Getting to it would be rough, especially for horses and pack mules. Someone had to be on the fire before dark.

Doug Finch alerted me and another smoke-chaser, Claude Curtis. We were the follow-up crew and probably wouldn't reach the fire until daylight the next day. The initial attack crew were two smoke-jumpers, who were stationed at Cave Junction about 200 miles away. Twenty-five minutes after Doug ordered the smoke-jumpers, they jumped from the airplane, their chutes billowing out like two giant orange and white toadstools floating toward earth. The jumpers hit the ground and set up their ground-to-air signal indicating they had landed safely.

The plane circled once so the pilot could read the signal. While the two men watched, the fire fighting tools, drinking water and food came floating down and landed in a little clearing. The two white drop chutes lost their shape and slowly settled to the ground. The food would last the men several days in case of bad luck. The drop plane made one more pass over the fire to make sure everything was okay. The pilot took a good look for spot fires which could trap the two fire fighters.

The two men were trained to work together as a team. First they located a safe spot to put their food and tools so the fire wouldn't get to them. Next they checked the fire for the hottest spots around the edge or the places where it was spreading the fastest. With safety in mind always, they kept a close watch for spot fires and burning tree tops and limbs, which could come down without warning. With the proper tools, the men started knocking down hot spots and building fireline, taking advantage of the cool evening and night air, which would help hold the flames in check. That time of day would make it easier to

bring the fire under control.

Claude Curtis met me on a ridge above Sumpter Creek on the Parker Meadow Road about two miles north of Nichol's Creek Campground. It was 4:00 p.m. when we spread our fireman's map out on a stump and planned our route of travel. It would mean we had to trust our compass and count paces to come anywhere near the fire. We calculated that it was about three miles to the fire. It was hard to tell exactly because our map didn't show topography. Marking three lines on the map gave us a good picture of our route of travel. One line followed a ridge almost due east for a mile, at 93° then changed course 10° toward the north, which would read 83° on the compass. By the looks of the map, we would be in rough cut-up country by the end of the second mile and maybe have to spend the night. The next line followed a due north course 360° for one and a quarter miles, which should bring us right to the fire.

We put our fire packs on our backs and lined out through the timber. The first mile was easy going, slightly uphill with open timber and not too many down trees to climb over. I bumped a vine maple branch, which had a bald hornet's nest hanging on the end of it; and we made excellent time for a ways, but didn't get stung. We covered the first mile in a half an hour.

Darkness was settling in now and we rested some while we got our flashlights from our packs and mounted them on our hard hats. By the looks of the terrain ahead, our second mile would be a lot rougher. The headwaters of Sumpter Creek consisted of several small streams originating from swampy spots and springs working their way down the mountain and finally coming together to form the main creek. Our line of sight cut across several sharp ridges and deep ravines.

The going got too rough to take chances at the end of our second mile. We could easily fall in a hole or get in a quicksand bog because it was a little swampy in spots. Claude and I had already climbed over huge downed trees blown over by the wind. In places the trees, laying criss-crossed, were twenty feet deep. We located a good spot to spend the night and called Doug to let him know how we were doing. He agreed we should wait until daylight then head on into the fire. We would release the two smokejumpers and let them walk out and hook a ride home.

Our campsite was on a slight rise where most of the timber had blown down. There was one Douglas-fir tree about five feet in diameter at the butt, which stretched along the ground for a hundred and fifty feet. It had a root system that looked like a huge peacock's tail. When the tree fell, a large patch of soil clung to its roots leaving a shallow hole where it once stood. We took a shovel and smoothed out the bottom of the hole and built a fire there. The root system formed a wall on one side and reflected heat back on us and sheltered us from the cold night air.

Claude Curtis was an old-timer and loved the hardships we were having right then. He and I had chased smoke a lot, but never under such circumstances. We fashioned a bed out of tree bark and dry dirt at each side of the fire and rounded up enough wood to last until morning. Claude didn't have a coat, but did bring along an old burlap drop parachute, which 1 had in my car. He put me in mind of an Indian chief sitting wrapped up, head and all in burlap. I always carried a sheepskin vest to put on under my jacket.

We stoked up the fire and settled down for the night. It was so comfortable lying there in the warm dirt; the heat felt good. I drifted off to sleep immediately, only to be awakened by cold rain on my face. Luckily it didn't last long. I rebuilt the fire and went to sleep again.

The fire died down and Claude woke up nearly frozen. The burlap parachute pulled tight around him didn't help much. He put every bit of wood we had left on the fire. It got so hot, it nearly scorched my coat. I woke up thinking the fire had got away and had better check our equipment. One glance told me the story. We had to leave our warm nests for about an hour until the fire cooled down enough for us to return. I slept like a baby until daylight. We pried ourselves up and worked our cramped muscles loose by rounding up some wood for a breakfast fire.

We had some rough going ahead, by the looks of things. I called Doug and told him we were heading on a 360° course and should be getting to the fire in about two hours. We crossed several deep ravines filled with wind-fall trees, brush and blackberry vines. Swampy areas and springs, with tall swamp grass and swarms of hungry mosquitoes, were in our path. It was a warm, cloudless day, which felt good to our chilled bodies.

After an hour and a half of tough going, we spotted two parachutes. The bright orange and white silk covered two areas where they had settled down on the brush after they had lowered their burdens safely to the ground. We saw smoke coming from the tall timber about a hundred yards from the brushfield. We had come straight to the fire! It is quite a challenge to follow a compass course and locate an unknown place in timbered country.

The two smoke-jumpers were glad to see us. They were anxious to be released so they could return to their base and be available to jump on another fire. Claude and I sized up the situation and could plainly see why the fire had burned slowly for eighteen days after the original lightning strike before flaring up. The lightning had hit a big Douglas-fir and peeled off a huge chunk of bark and wood in a spiral pattern down the trunk. It went down a tree root into the ground and set fire to dry limbs and needles at the base of the tree.

The fire must have burned hot for a short time - that was when Howard saw the smoke rise from the tree tops, eighteen days before. Then the second storm moved over the fire, putting down a lot of rain, and drowned out all the fire except where it smoldered away in the end of a large rotten log. The fire remained hot and barbecued in the punky log for eighteen days during which time the sun dried the surrounding area and finally it flamed up again. The burned area was shaped about like an hourglass and had covered less than a quarter of an acre of ground, thanks to the quick action of the smoke-jumpers.

We relieved the two men and watched them head out through the timber toward home base, carrying their heavy fire packs and smoke-jumping outfits. They had fought the fire all night and the looks of them showed it. They were covered with black ashes and dirt because of the mop-up work they had done on their hands and knees. About all that was left to do was to watch for hot spots to show up and make sure the fireline would hold if the fire flared up. I took my compass and made a map of the fire. We could tell the shape of it and also see what the acreage was.

Claude and I crawled around the fireline on our hands and knees, feeling

every inch of the fire's edge. We worked all through the burned area, using our bare hands, looking for any hot spots that might be left. Claude reached in a hole, where a root had burned out. He jerked his hand back quickly. There were hot coals at the bottom of the hole, though no smoke was coming up. He dug out the hot spot in a few minutes and that was the last one we found.

Fire-fighters sift the ashes and probe the burned areas of a fire with their bare hands, but I have never seen a man blister his fingers yet. It is the only sure way of detecting hot coals, which would otherwise go unnoticed and could cause a lot of trouble later.

After we finished digging the hot coals out of the hole that Claude found, we looked at the time. We had to spend six daylight hours at the fire after the last spark was out. With a little luck, our six hours would be up about 3:00 p.m. This would allow us to get almost to the main road before dark.

While we waited, we rested, then got our fire packs repacked. We spent most of the time looking for hidden sparks or burning embers deep in the ground. We couldn't take a chance on leaving any hot spots because it was a three hour walk to check the fire again, or take a chance on it blowing up and burning more timber.' The six-hour wait was just about up. We figured that 15 minutes wouldn't make any difference on a fire that size. We put our fire packs on our backs and stood side by side looking at the burned-out fire. This was one of the dozens of small fires we had died out that was started by lightning.

We headed toward Parker Meadows Road at five minutes till 3:00 p.m. On a due west course, the going wasn't too bad because of open timber and it was mostly downhill. The sun was getting lower and the evening was cooling down. There was Rustler Peak Lookout in the distance, seen from an opening in the timber. Judging from where the Peak was, and where we were, we should be about half a mile from our cars.

Twenty minutes later we came out at Spring Creek and had to walk a short distance to the rigs. It was about a half hour before dark. Claude continued on to his home in Butte Falls, while I headed down an old dirt road toward Lodgepole. Lights were on in every room and a gas lantern was hanging from a tree limb in the yard. Rustler Peak Lookout had called my wife and kids to let them know when I would be home.

Each time I returned home from fighting fire, it was sort of like a celebration for the family. My kids met me at the gate, tugging at my coat as my wife looked on from a distance. Much chattering and laughing prevailed among the kids, especially when they saw how black and dirty I was. Don said I looked slimmer every time I came home from a fire.

The nights at Lodgepole were getting colder and meant the fall season was again upon us. Another wonderful summer was slipping by and my family would move back to Butte Falls. A final trip or two to move the crews out of the high country, a last 26 mile ride from Lodgepole to the winter pasture at Bowen Creek, and it was the end of another long, hard season.

By now, I felt like a full-fledged packer; and it was quite a letdown to pull the shoes off the feet of my horses and mules and not be able to ride or pack all winter. One thing for sure though, I would feed my stock everyday enroute to my winter-time job of marking and cruising timber. Each day at about the same time, I would see and be with my Government mules. For a few moments

my mind would be flooded with many pleasant memories of the things we had done together.

From the day we moved back to Butte Falls until we returned to Lodgepole was a completely different life style. My Forest Service job was year around now and it gave me an opportunity to learn many things that was to help me in later years. It is a wonderful thing to work for, and a man got out of it exactly what he put into it.

The rangers taught me how to mark and cruise timber and how to lay-out vast timber sales. Much of this was done on snowshoes, and much of the time I worked alone. The winter went by fast. Soon there would be another change of pace. The lower ends of all roads and trails could be opened up. Doug would generally put me in charge of that task; and with two other men, we would try and keep up with the oncoming season ahead.

Telephone lines were put back up and working. There were many miles to take care of. At that time, all guard stations and lookouts were tied together by phone lines, even Blue Rock.

Soon Doug would have to prepare for fire school at Camp 2, and before we knew it, my family would be heading back to Lodgepole with me and those wonderful Government mules.

CHAPTER 16

EPISODE AT BARE FACE BUTTE

Many unusual things have happened to me while working with my Government mules. During the peak of the season, I would be in the saddle seven days a week and often cover twenty to forty miles in a day and night. My regular trips were packing supplies to three and sometimes four lookouts and two trail crews, one at Hemlock Lake and one at Heather Ponds for three years in a row and also pack in supplies to fires at many places on the Butte Falls District and other districts too.

Once every two weeks, more often if necessary, I made a trip to Devil's Peak. It was on one of my regularly scheduled trips that I really got fouled up. This was while Neil Richardson was on the lookout. I rode in one day with only one pack horse. The load was light and we made good time. At the hitching rail, I unpacked Dusty and loosened the cinch on Sundee so the animals could rest better.

The only activity around the lookout was a couple of chipmunks scampering about trying to out run Snoopy. I supposed that Neil might have walked down to the spring to get some drinking water. I went on into the lookout and put the groceries away. It was routine policy that the packer check in with headquarters before leaving, so I warmed up the big radio Neil used and called Doug and told him that Neil wasn't around. Doug said he had dispatched Neil to a fire the afternoon before and had just forgotten to tell me about it.

The fire was on Bare Face Butte, eleven miles north on the Skyline Trail. Three days before, there had been a storm on the summit of the Cascade Range. No fires were detected at the time, but there were a lot of hot strikes in the area of Ruth, Ethel and Maude Mountains and on westward toward Ranger Springs and Bare Face Butte.

Neil had watched the general area closely until finally a fire showed up. Around 1:00 in the afternoon a column of smoke had come straight up and curved toward the west. Neil got a fix on the base of the fire and turned it in. Being a lookout fireman he was equipped to fight fire and Doug had dispatched him to the fire to make the initial attack.

With a forty pound fire pack on his back, including a Handi-Talkie radio, Neil left the lookout immediately and arrived at the fire about an hour before dark. He wore blisters on the tops of his toes on both feet and had to stop and doctor them enroute. His foot gear was the wrong kind – loose-fitting boots with about ten inch tops. He should have worn laced boots to keep his feet from slipping back and forth.

The fire had started in an old growth Shasta fir. There were dead limbs and rotten pitchy places all up and down the trunk. It had smoldered away for quite awhile, and then the tree burned off about thirty feet above the ground. The top fell and landed in a thick grove of smaller trees in the edge of a meadow.

That was when it started to smoke up and Neil had seen the smoke from the lookout.

As soon as he got to the fire he checked in on the radio and told Doug what he had found and then started working a fireline around the edge to keep it from spreading. Neil threw dirt on one of the many hot spots which might give him trouble. On the opposite side of the fire, a hot spot took hold on some dead limbs and small trees and picked up momentum. It crowned out in the green trees. Neil threw dirt into the inferno as fast as he could dig it up. Each time running in as close as he could to throw the dirt and then dashed back because the heat was so intense. He took his pulaski and used the hoe side to dig the hard soil loose. He grabbed his shovel and scooped up a shovelful of the loose dirt and dashed to the fire to throw it as high as he could so it would spread out.

In his excitement, he didn't watch where he was stepping. He ran through some hot ashes and then landed in a burning stump hole with both feet. Hot coals filled his boots. He fell back and pulled them off. The pain was terrible and he saw that his ankles had a few third-degree burns, and the bottoms of both feet were solid blisters. The thin soled boots burned through quickly. Neil was out of the picture as a fire-fighter now, but the fire continued to burn.

He crawled to his radio and told Doug what had happened. The only chance to control the fire was smoke-jumpers. Maybe they could get them on the fire before dark. The smoke-jumper base at Cave Junction responded immediately to Doug's call. They could have two men on the fire in around twenty minutes, plenty of time before it got too dark to jump. The smoke-jumpers would bring more first aid equipment to doctor Neil's feet.

Neil watched the two men jump from the twin engine Beechcraft. The orange and white parachutes billowed out and reflected the setting sun. The jumpers landed and spread a ground-to-air signal in a nearby glade to let the pilot know they had come down safely. After another pass over the fire, equipment and food were dropped, using smaller white silk parachutes.

Sixty gallons of water came down in three separate drops. Water dropped at fires is generally in five-gallon cans and may be used to drink or to help in suppressing the fire. For water drops, burlap parachutes were used. Where the terrain is too rocky, full cans of water cannot be dropped because when the cans land on rocks, the metal will puncture and the water is lost in most cases. The alternative is to drop a number of empty cans with large openings and tight lids and several hundred pounds of block ice. The fire-fighters then break the ice into small chunks and fill the cans. In a short time, the ice melts and water is available for them to drink.

Neil had cleared off a small area and built a warming fire. The two smoke-jumpers talked to him briefly then undertook the task of knocking down the fire. Two hours of hard work put the fire under control, but they would work on mop-up all night long before the last spark was finally dead out. Neil was moving about on his hands and knees, stoking up his warming fire when the two men at last took time to rest. They looked at his feet, but couldn't do too much for him. He was in bad shape.

After giving me this account of what had happened at Bare Face Butte, Doug gave me some final instructions. I would ride down to the fire and bring

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He crawled to his radio and told Doug what had happened. The only chance to control the fire was smoke-jumpers. Maybe they could get them on the fire before dark. The smoke-jumper base at Cave Junction responded immediately to Doug's call. They could have two men on the fire in around twenty minutes, plenty of time before it got too dark to jump. The smoke-jumpers would bring more first aid equipment to doctor Neil's feet.

Neil watched the two men jump from the twin engine Beechcraft. The orange and white parachutes billowed out and reflected the setting sun. The jumpers landed and spread a ground-to-air signal in a nearby glade to let the pilot know they had come down safely. After another pass over the fire, equipment and food were dropped, using smaller white silk parachutes.

Sixty gallons of water came down in three separate drops. Water dropped at fires is generally in five-gallon cans and may be used to drink or to help in suppressing the fire. For water drops, burlap parachutes were used. Where the terrain is too rocky, full cans of water cannot be dropped because when the cans land on rocks, the metal will puncture and the water is lost in most cases. The alternative is to drop a number of empty cans with large openings and tight lids and several hundred pounds of block ice. The fire-fighters then break the ice into small chunks and fill the cans. In a short time, the ice melts and water is available for them to drink.

Neil had cleared off a small area and built a warming fire. The two smoke-jumpers talked to him briefly then undertook the task of knocking down the fire. Two hours of hard work put the fire under control, but they would work on mop-up all night long before the last spark was finally dead out. Neil was moving about on his hands and knees, stoking up his warming fire when the two men at last took time to rest. They looked at his feet, but couldn't do too much for him. He was in bad shape.

After giving me this account of what had happened at Bare Face Butte, Doug gave me some final instructions. I would ride down to the fire and bring

Neil out. That would be quite a task to accomplish before dark. Had I known about all this before, it would have been so simple to bring along more pack and riding stock. But often many days passed that I didn't talk to Doug on the phone and just went about the packing job on my own.

I left the lookout and headed north. During the day, I had developed a headache; and it soon got worse. We were just short of Maude Mountain when I had to stop. My head hurt so bad I could hardly see. I tied up near a small grassy opening, stretched out under a tree and fell asleep immediately. I slept soundly for a little over 45 minutes then something woke me up. My head felt better, but my whole body was shaky. That was always a sign my headache was about gone. I got back in the saddle and rode on up the trail to the fire. Neil was lying on the ground when I got there. Both his feet were bandaged.

The fire was controlled and nearly all out. I signed a form the smokejumpers had to indicate they were released to go home. They left immediately by way of the Middle Fork Trail. Their destination was Imnaha Guard Station. I crammed the parachutes, jump suits and helmets into four canvas bags. When a bag was full and the draw string pulled tight, it was four feet long and sixteen inches in diameter. Together the four bags weighed about 220 pounds. I put a few things in the pack boxes and loaded the bags on top of them. The pack cover helped to hold the load in place.

While I was tying Rusty's load down, she took a mighty dim view of packing such a load. To show her spite, she reached out and bit a mouthful of bark from a Noble fir and chewed it up like peanut-brittle. She sifted the pieces of bark out between her teeth and bit off another mouthful, chewed it up and spit it out. She kept this up until I tied the rope off on the side of her pack.

I helped Neil to get his loose-fitting boots on over the bandages. He climbed up behind my saddle. I mounted and we headed for Devil's Peak, eleven miles away. Each time Rusty came to a pole across the trail or a little dip, like a water bar, she would rear up on her hind legs and paw the air, then lunge forward and barely miss Sundee with her front feet as she came down. I would spur ahead to keep out of reach. This was rather frightening for Neil, but I sure had no intention of walking.

It was pitch dark by the time we reached Honeymoon Creek. It is two miles from Seven Lakes Basin, where the trail starts up toward the lookout. When we were going up the switchbacks toward the saddle between Lee Peak and Devil's Peak, Rusty would cut across on the corners. She would step on the flat rocks and her feet would slip off. Several times she appeared to be running in place as she tried to stand up. Sparks a foot long flew from her steel shod feet. and lit up the ground beneath her. What an experience for Neil!

It was past midnight when we finally reached the lookout. I tied Rusty to the hitching rail and led Sundee right up to the front door of the house. Neil got to the ground with much effort. He crawled on hands and knees up the steps and into the house. The wind was blowing hard. I took Sundee and Rusty down the trail and tied them up in a clump of trees to shelter them from the wind. There were about two gallons of oats left in a can which I kept at the lookout for emergencies. I fed them some and saved the rest for their breakfast.

While I was taking care of the stock, Neil crawled about on his hands and knees and got supper. He fixed boiled rice with raisins. It tasted good. That

night - what was left of it - I spent on a canvas cot. There were no extra covers so I rolled up in a burlap parachute. My dog slept under the wood-heating stove. He snored until daylight. The wind blew hard; there were gusts up to fifty miles an hour. The temperature dropped and I thought I would freeze to a solid block of ice before morning. Neil slept like a log. The wind was so cold and my dog's snoring so loud that sleep was almost impossible for me.

Daylight finally came and although the warm sun shining through the windows felt good, I still was cold. We ate a simple breakfast of corn flakes and milk. A cup of coffee would have been a real treat. Neil called Doug and told him we would be leaving in about fifteen minutes. I saddled Sundee and helped Neil get on her back. I would ride Rusty bareback the remaining nine miles to the Parker Meadows Road. Neil never complained a bit. He was a tough man. His father had planned on coming up to Devil's Peak to visit for a couple of days. He and Doug got to the trailhead at about the same time. He was surely surprised to see Neil come riding down the trail.

I heard later that Neil's doctor was quite concerned when he looked at his blistered feet. Needless to say, he was grounded for a week or so; and even when he could walk again, his feet were tender. The next day I headed back to Devil's Peak with three mule loads of supplies for another man who rode in with me. I packed up all of Neil's things and brought them out with the smoke-jumpers equipment that was left at the lookout the night before.

CHAPTER 17

LODGEPOLE, OUR SUMMER HOME

The month of May finally rolled around and some of the summer help started drifting back. Everything took on a different look and a new season was just around the corner. During the last few months a lot of things had happened. Our youngest little girl was big enough to follow the older kids everywhere now. Don, Tricia, Janna and Leslie had a long, exciting summer ahead. It would be interesting to see what the kids would dream up to do this summer.

I took a crew of men to the north end of the district to open up a fire road. We weren't too far from the Lodgepole Guard Station, so I suggested we eat lunch there and see how the buildings stood the winter weather. Things looked good, except the pasture fence. It was all torn down along one side. The wire was pulled loose from eleven fence posts. There was long coarse hair caught on the barbs in several places. A herd of elk had stampeded and knocked the fence to the ground. We figured a cougar had caused the run-away.

It took several days to open up the roads because the winter weather had knocked lots of trees down. Trees were across the road, large and small. Some of the bigger trees that fell knocked down several smaller ones. It took a lot of time to remove the debris.The second day on the road maintenance job put

Drinking creek water, first day at Lodgepole

us near the Imnaha Guard Station. We ate our lunches in the yard in front of the house. I noticed a hump of dirt, leaves and sticks near the pasture fence, a few yards from where we ate, and went to look at it. We had found where a cougar had killed a deer. He ate about half of it and covered the rest with debris.

With the road maintenance done as far as the snow-line, we started to work on the forest trails. There were over 200 miles of trails scattered over the whole district. Each day we would fill our lunch pails with tasty Morell mushrooms, which grew in the berm of the trails. Snow mosquitoes were thick. I always carried a half ounce bottle of oil of citronella in my cruiser vest pocket. Just a little dab here and there would keep them away.

The rivers and creeks were swollen with the spring run-off of melting snow. Some of the foot logs were gone, and the ones which were left were a hazard to cross. Water splashed at our feet as we shuffled across. One crew member couldn't stand to go over the swift-moving water. He sat down and scooted along as the cold water splashed against his body. Me and my crew of two or three men spent two weeks on trail maintenance. The early spring work was hard, but fun. Even so, we were looking forward to the day when my family and I could move back to Lodgepole.

Moving to Lodgepole wasn't such a hard task this year. We used the stock truck and got the moving done in one day. The horses and mules were already in the pasture and enjoying the fresh green grass and rolling in their favorite dust bowls. The lawn was green with lots of wild strawberries coming in everywhere. Ripe red berries were ready to be picked by eager fingers of our children. There were two things which they always raced to do. One was to run to the swift running creek, which ran from one corner of the pasture to the

Family at Lodgepole House

other. For a hundred feet the creek was wide and shallow. Here the kids would lay on their tummies and drink the cold pure water. The older children had fun teaching our two year old, Leslie, all the exciting things to do. Leslie squealed and giggled as the ripples bounced and tickled her nose. The other fun thing, of course, to pick strawberries from the lush plants that grew everywhere in Lodgepole yard. During the first three or four days, there would be four little heads together somewhere in the yard picking strawberries from a single plant. Their conversation would be,"One for Janna, one for Tricia, one for Leslie and one for me." Don was always the leader. This year their ages were Don 7, Tricia 5, Janna 4, and little Leslie was 2 years old.

It was good to be starting another summer at Lodgepole. I had a list of things I wanted to do in addition to the list of things Doug always furnished me with. I wanted to rebuild the feed rack so I could saddle up the horses and mules and tie them to it. When a storm passed over and a fire took off in the back country, my get-away time with a saddle horse and pack string was 15 minutes. Whoever set up that time limit either didn't know too much about stock, or wasn't using regular Forest Service horses and mules.

I rebuilt all the corrals and fences around the place and made things look pretty nice. Seems like no one had ever really taken an interest before we came. My trips to the high country included cargoing several more pit toilets, tables and garbage pit covers to several camp sites. The people were going to the remote camps in greater numbers, and contamination was getting to be a real problem. Toilets weren't the answer, but they would help.

Britt Ash had a good idea of building the pre-fab toilets out of a hardboard, that would withstand rough weather. Like I mentioned before, one toilet was bound up in two bundles and weighed about 150 pounds each. The bundles were six feet long and three and a half feet wide. They were a bearcat to put on a mule; but I loaded a lot of them, once I got a good carrier. When Britt was transferred to Alaska, I decided to lighten the heavy loads and put one toilet on two mules. It was a lot easier on me, and it didn't hurt Tom and Dillon so bad when they carried them. The new District Ranger, Ralph Weise, didn't care how the toilets were packed in. The main thing with him was to get the job done.

My Government mules and horses were well civilized. It took a lot of care and currying to get them used to me and my ways. I would walk out the kitchen door before daylight and stand in the yard and listen. There wasn't a sound anywhere. I whistled once and listened, then whistled the second time. Movement started from nine different sources. The thumps and clatter of flying hooves headed in my direction. The stock came crashing through the lodgepole thickets and serviceberry brush. In a moment, they were all around me, snorting and blowing their noses, crowding in to get the first mouthful of oats. I caught the ones I needed first, then caught everybody else and tied them to the fence. They all got a helping of oats whether they were used or not. I never had any trouble with my stock because I treated them the same as if they were humans. After all, they had feelings too.

My first pack trip was always the long drag to Devil's Peak Lookout. The man trained to do the job of fire detection would stay on the summit of the high Cascades all summer in a 14 x 14 foot house. He would watch over the Seven

Lakes Basin and the wilderness country to the north. The scenery was beautiful. Upper Klamath Lake was visible in the distance to the southeast of the lookout.

Doug decided to go with me on my first trip in. I saddled four pack animals and two riding horses. The truck was only big enough to haul four head, so Tom and Dillon would trot along behind while it moved along slowly down the road. Neil Richardson, who was on Devil's Peak in 1953 and 1954, would be on Rustler Peak this year with his bride. We all hoped she would like living at the lookout.

Doug met me with a pickup load of stuff to be packed to Devil's Peak. The load included two Forest Service radios, with a supply of batteries, that was one mule-load by itself. There were miscellaneous articles to be used for making repairs on the lookout house; load number two. Personal articles, books and groceries made up the packs for two more mules. I lashed each load down, using the hitch Britt Ash had taught me. It would take a real run-away to loosen the lash ropes on these packs.

The first five miles were trouble free. The day was beautiful and we felt good. We crossed the first frozen snowdrift. The mules took big mouthfuls of snow. They were thirsty. The drifts got closer together until finally it was steady travel over the frozen snow. The stock with their heavy loads did not break through. The going was good down the east slope and for a ways across a series of clearings north of Heather Ponds. There were places where the stock sunk in a few inches, but nothing bad.

It looked like we might make this trip without any problems. We rode a little further and my thoughts were changed completely. Dillon went down, his heavy load of radios and batteries caused him to fall through the rotten snow. He slid on his side, with feet uphill, for thirty feet, rolled over twice and slid for another fifty feet and landed against a big boulder that stopped his descent. He lay where he landed until I got to him. After a few minutes of rest, he got up very carefully and almost shook his load off. The tumble didn't injure him any. The hitch held everything in place, but his load was lopsided. I repacked him on the spot. From here on, Dillon would follow along instead of being led. He would pick his way up the mountain much easier by himself.

A short distance farther, three more animals went down, including my horse. He sank into the snow to his belly, my feet jammed into the snow to my knees. He was high centered over a log. The snow had melted away by the log causing, in effect, a tunnel down each side. My horse went downhill sideways and rolled. As he did, I bailed out of the saddle toward the uphill side, landed on my back and started sliding.

Doug was laughing his head off as I slid past my floundering horse and landed against a small tree. By then, the horse was up and appeared unhurt. We went to the rescue of the two mules who hadn't rolled too far before they landed against something. We had to repack each one., What had created the trouble spot was an opening, where the morning sun had shone against the snow for quite awhile and softened the frozen surface. Once we broke through, the snow from there to the ground was too honeycombed and loose to hold any weight. This is called rotten snow.

After we got across the opening, things went well until we were almost to

the ridgetop leading toward the lookout. Smokey, the gray pack mare, was carrying side packs filled with canned goods, boxes of food and jars of jam, peanut butter and pickles. I had fixed the top pack in a special container, which included eggs, bread and cookies. The poor old girl did fine until she started up a steep pitch. Her hind legs broke through the snow pack and sank deep. She fell over backwards and went end over end down the mountain and passed over a large boulder on the way.

The impact of her body against the rounded boulder dislodged it and down the mountain it went. Smokey came to a stop against a couple of mountain hemlock trees. The boulder, about four feet in diameter, picked up speed. We sat on our horses and watched in horror at what was about to happen. All the bad things ever said about the smokey-colored mare seemed trivial now. We would do anything to save her from the horrible disaster about to occur. The big rock was headed toward her rump where she wasn't protected by the pack. It rolled up against her and stopped, then rolled back about a foot. Maybe Smokey wasn't injured.

Before the rock had stopped moving, Doug and I were out of our saddles and on our way to the rescue. Smokey had rolled better than eighty feet. Doug beat me down the hill, and I slid to his side. Smokey's head was bent back and one leg didn't look good. So far, she was still alive, but that seemed about all.

I had always thought old Smokey was too blamed ornery to die; but now that she was in such a bad fix, I felt a little sick. It was up to us to help her because she was beyond helping herself. Smokey was scared. I got down by her head and talked to her, and she quieted down. I had quieted Smokey and everyone of the other horses and mules sometime or another when they were down and helpless and floundering. It always worked because they knew my voice and trusted me.

Doug was looking the situation over and felt along the leg which was buried under the snow. Smokey tried to get up; and as she kicked and pawed the air, her hind foot hit a dead tree limb, which flew around and struck Doug's left elbow. From here on, it would be up to me to finish the whole job. It must have chipped the bone because in just a short time, Doug's elbow had a large knot sticking out on one side. It hurt him bad.

A packer always carries a sharp pocket knife. He never knows when he might have to cut lash ropes to help a pack animal get out of a predicament. My knife cut Smokey's pack loose so she was free of the load, but she never moved. I was talking to her constantly; and by now, I felt that she was okay, but we would soon find out. I stood back out of her way, where she could see me and stood still for a moment not saying a word. In one fast motion, I grabbed my hat, let out a war-whoop, slapped my chaps and got over-balanced and fell down. All the commotion spooked Smokey so bad she gave one big floundering jump and got to her feet. I felt her ribs and looked her over. She climbed to the ridge top easily with no load. She wasn't hurt. A hump of packed snow had cushioned the impact of the boulder.

The young man we were escorting to the lookout was really worried about his food. He saw Smokey land on the eggs, bread and cookies several times as she rolled down the hillside. The mare weighed about 1400 pounds. He was a school boy from the city, and just wasn't used to this sort of roughing it. I

wouldn't let him help me back-pack Smokey's load to the ridge-top because there wasn't any use taking a chance on having another casualty on my hands.

Awhile later, Smokey was again packed and ready to go. Doug was still lamenting about his sore arm. There was one more obstacle to cross; as we rode up the switchbacks on the south side of the hill, I could see it. We pulled up at the foot of a huge snow drift. According to the trees around the area, it was about 35 or 40 feet deep and over 100 feet long this year, and we couldn't tell how wide it was from where we sat. There was one place we might make it and Doug gave it a try. Sundee dug in with her feet and struggled to the top. Only the first ten feet were the steepest. I followed Doug leading Smokey, and we could see the roof of the lookout house up ahead.

The lookout had wintered well. In a short time, the pack stock were unloaded; and an hour later, the shutters were up and coffee was boiling on the kerosene stove. One job I attended to right away was to open the box which had the eggs, bread and cookies in it. The young man examined each carton of eggs. There wasn't an egg broken. The bread wasn't hurt and the cookies were not crumbled. Doug showed the new fire-detection man around his summer home. He had already attended a three-day fire training school. Doug would be back in a few days to help him some more. By then, he would have a lot of questions.

I got the stock saddled and ready to ride by the time Doug was ready to leave. The sun was getting low and we had nine miles to cover. As we passed down over the snow, we had some trouble even without the heavy loads. There were four head of stock down and sliding at one time, but it wasn't quite so bad as coming up. It was easier on them than it was when they were loaded. It was dark by the time we reached the truck and it took two more hours before we got to Lodgepole and took care of the stock. We had worked hard for over eighteen hours. I lost over five pounds that first trip, and the stock looked slimmer too. None of us had eaten much during the day, but neither of us would ever have it any other way. That was what we called "real living."

A good pack animal is one of the finest possessions a man can have. A good packer takes care of his stock and works with them a lot. The way I loaded a mule and lashed the load on now, it was a rare thing to rub a spot on one of their hides; but every time someone else used my mules, they got rubbed and skinned up. There were several saddle pads with holes cut to fit over a bad rub. That way there wouldn't be any pressure on the sore spot. By doctoring the rub and taking care of it, the mule wouldn't be laid up at all. I would put packs on them everyday for long drags, and they would heal up and hair over. Sometimes the hair would come back white. To help make their backs tough, I often bathed them in warm salt water. It not only did them some good, but they also liked the attention.

CHAPTER 18

DRY LIGHTNING ON LABOR DAY WEEKEND

Summertime was beginning to run out. The end of my third season was coming to an end, and soon the year, 1955 would be history. It was the second day of September, just before Labor Day weekend. Doug informed me that the lightning prediction was 90% chance and wouldn't let up until the following day. All the smoke-chasers on the forest were being held at home on standby, waiting for something to cut loose. I caught the horses and mules and put their pack saddles on and tied them to the feed rack. My fire pack was readied and the car was running perfectly. All we needed was some action. The people on duty in the lookout towers were watching the build-ups of fluffy white clouds. They were solid looking and reached more than 20,000 feet high.

In those days, there were fourteen lookout towers on the Rogue River National Forest and we had four on our district. Rustler Peak was the main one, and was our communications hub. From there came a report of a flat-top. He was referring to one of the highest thunderheads which had reached its peak. The change in air aloft caused it to flatten out like an anvil. Things were beginning to happen. The sky got darker and thunder clouds started coming together from every direction. The first clap of thunder was reported by a lookout on the Ashland District south of Mount McLoughlin. Robinson Butte saw the first lightning strikes.

At Lodgepole, I led the horses and mules to the water trough for a good drink and each one seemed to drink more than usual. They were excited too. Then each animal got a second helping of oats. It could be a long night. By 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon, the old Butte Falls District was getting a beating from one end to the other. Lookouts were beginning to pick up fires all along the Cascade Divide. Any minute now all of us smoke-chasers would be on our way to one of them. My family and I were so excited we could hardly stand it. When the phone finally rang we nearly jumped out of our skins.

Doug had a hot one for me. Eagerly I copied the instructions on a Lookout Report Form. Time: 2:45 p.m.; distance 5 miles from Rustler Peak, airline; base sighted, yes; smoke drifting, northwest. The fire was burning hot and seemed to be gaining momentum. Getaway time for pack and saddle stock was fifteen minutes in the daytime. According to regulations, a packer was supposed to catch up and saddle one horse to ride and one mule to carry equipment, load the equipment on the mule and be in the saddle headed up the trail in 15 minutes. For my part, I tried to keep one jump ahead of regulations. My saddle was already on the horse and the mules were packed and ready to go. The stock had been on thirty-some odd trips this summer, some trips being three or four days long. They were tough as could be and none of them had saddle sores.

There was almost no rain with the storm, which meant the lightning was

reaching the ground, but the rain turned to vapor hundreds of feet above ground. They call this dry lightning because no water hits the ground cover to moisten the surface. I was to take two saddle horses and three mules to Wickiup Forest Camp. All I would need besides my own food and oats for the stock, was empty packs and one extra riding horse and saddle. Someone would meet me with equipment to pack to the fire and one man would ride with me.

I arrived at point one in plenty of time. An early darkness settled over us. There were hot flashes of lightning in every direction. I went to each mule and looked him over. It seemed to make them feel a little more secure. The horses were nervous too. I sat down on a pile of boxes and pack covers. The night air was a little cold so I pulled a pack cover over myself and waited. My little dog curled up beside me and listened wide-eyed to the thunder. It was after 9:00 when we heard the sound of a car motor as a set of headlights showed up through the trees. Soon a pickup turned off the road and parked. It was loaded with equipment to pack in to the fire. There was a big load for each mule, including several power saws and the fuel to be used in them. There was a lot of miscellaneous equipment too, like axes, shovels and hazel hoes.

John, the driver of the pickup, was in my way constantly. Seems as though he had done a little packing way back when and thought the double diamond was the only thing in the way of hitches. I agreed with him that the diamond hitch was good; but for me, it wasn't the best. I preferred my own hitch, which I knew would hold each precarious load in place as we traveled over the unfamiliar trail toward Red Lake.

John rode behind the pack string, which was his choice. He seemed to think my mules should be hiked along non-stop all the way to the fire. He jabbered like a magpie as we rode along; and then to speed things along, he broke off a dead limb and hit Tom on the rump with it. We had a runaway which left John gasping in a cloud of dust way behind. When he finally caught up to us, the first thing he saw was me standing in the middle of the trail. I grabbed hold of the bridle on his horse and began to set the would-be mule-skinner straight about who was doing the packing and who would set the pace. He seemed to catch on because from that moment on, he rode ahead of me and cut down on the big talk considerably.

The Red Lake Trail passes through several old lava flows. There were a lot of switchbacks on the trail, which was new to me. It reaches the Skyline Trail about three miles north of Red Lake and comes in at an angle on a turn. From there, it is a straight shot south toward Blue Canyon and Four Mile Lake. John and I arrived at Red Lake at 3:00 o'clock in the morning. I unpacked while John kept his mouth shut and watched. With everybody comfortable, we built a warming fire and fixed ourselves something to eat. John was still a little unfriendly, which made it easier on me. There was no love lost at all, especially as far as Tom was concerned.

Soon there would be a bunch of men coming up the trail from Blue Rock. They should be here by daylight. I was enjoying the rest and because it was cold, the fire felt so good against my tired back. Tom and Dillon started moving around; and when I went over to where they were, Dillon was looking down the trail. There were thirteen flashlights coming over a little rise in the terrain. The crew was coming in. I woke John so he could latch onto his favorite power

saw. The crew foreman seemed surprised that we had beat him to Red Lake.

Everyone would rest until daylight. An airplane was to fly over and pinpoint the fire so the men could walk straight to it. I dozed off for awhile only to wake up with a start. Tom brayed loudly and woke everyone. It was daylight and there was plenty of work to do. The airplane flew over and dropped instructions to the crew. They should follow the Skyline Trail north for a mile and a half. When they reached that point, the foreman should signal the plane with a flashing mirror. Meanwhile, the pilot would be looking for more fires to show up in the adjacent area.

I followed behind the crew with the pack stock. John was on foot now and as far as I cared, he could stay that way. The crew stopped after a mile and a half and the foreman gave the airplane a flash with his mirror. The plane dipped a wing and swung around due west. About a mile off the trail he started circling the fire, which was about ten acres in size. The men headed for the fire.

About 8:00 in the morning, a crew member was coming through the timber, blazing a trail for me to follow with the pack string. The whole country is cut up with long fingers of lava rock extending from the Divide clear to the South Fork of the Rogue River. Some are shallow enough for timber to grow on and others are long narrow mounds of jumbled rock. Two of the flows were over fifty feet across and it looked impassible to me. I got down and led Molly across the worst places. With lead ropes tied up, the pack stock followed along behind.

Around the edge of every flat boulder was a wide crack, sometimes two or three feet across; and you could see down between them for several feet. Molly was surefooted as a goat. She would step from one rock to another after putting her nose against it to check its stability. When we had crossed over the first dike, Molly and I stood at the edge of a grove of Douglas firs and watched the mules cross the rockpile. Each one went his separate way. Tom almost followed my route; but after putting his nose close to one of the big rocks, he turned and went around it to another one. About halfway over, Dillon was turned sideways to me standing on a jagged-topped rock with all four feet just inches apart. It resembled a circus stunt with his 200 pound load arched high on his back. As he stood watching the progress of the other mule and horse, he looked down, first to one side, then the other. A front foot reached out and rested on the rock ahead of him. He held his nose against the rock for a moment, then put all his weight down. From here on, he came across with no hesitation, stepping from one rock to another after checking it out with his nose.

The fire was in the edge of a mass of scattered boulders. Green timber of large size grew in clumps with dead brush and downed rotten logs scattered about. There were over twenty acres burning by now, in a blow-up condition. If the fire fighters couldn't control it soon, there would be thousands of acres of primitive area go up in smoke. I would certainly do my part, along with Molly and the pack mules to help get the fire corraled.

The crew had cleared an area of fair size to be used as a fire camp. One thoughtful man had rigged a hitching rail in the shelter of a grove of Mountain Hemlock so Molly and the mules could enjoy the shade after a long, hot trip. For the rest of the morning I made several trips from Red Lake to the fire with

cans filled with water. Each mule carried about thirty gallons of water, which weighed around 240 pounds. The short trips didn't hurt the pack stock,carrying that big a load. My last trip in, I decided to let Tom rest for awhile because he was older than the others and I felt sorry for him. I led the two pack animals to the fire on foot, then rode one when I returned to the main trail.

On one return trip, I thought maybe we could locate a new route, so after crossing the last lava dike, I headed south to see if it was possible to work our way below the lava fingers stretching southwest toward the river. The timber opened up and the traveling was easy. My horse entered a beautiful timbered flat about ten acres in size. I was surprised at the cleaned-up appearance under the trees. It would be interesting to know how come it looked like that. Maybe a fast ground fire had consumed all the needles and dead limbs a few years back, which gave it the park-like appearance. It would be nice to build a cabin here to come back to someday. I rode around the nice beauty spot to discover that it was almost surrounded by lava flows, except to the north. After awhile, I realized that maybe we had fooled around enough and tried to decide which way the trail might be from where we were. Backtracking would take too long.

My horse insisted on going in a northerly direction, but I just knew the trail was due east of me. A half hour later we were still trying to find the trail. There were no familiar landmarks. A little canyon showed up dead ahead of me and I knew that wasn't right. Back on the trail stood Tom Mule and Molly. Tom was straining his big ears to pick-up any sound that would indicate the return of the other stock. When I rode over a rocky hill south of him, he recognized the sound of horseshoes clattering over the rocks. Tom took in a deep breath, opened his mouth wide and cut loose with the most unearthly noise one could imagine. It wasn't like a burro braying, or a horse nickering, but rather something like a terrific amount of air pressure escaping from a series of different-sized holes. Tom was hollering us back to the trail. It took about ten minutes to locate the trail with Tom's earth-shaking noise about every two or three minutes.

After many hours without sleep, and a night and most of the day in the saddle, my senses were dulled – except hunger. We went to Red Lake for some rest. I pulled the saddles off everybody so they could roll and relax, then built a small fire and warmed some C rations for dinner. It was about 3:00 o'clock when we hit the trail again, down past the fire trail, headed for home. At the junction, we turned off the Skyline Trail onto the Red Lake Trail. The day was hot and it was difficult to stay awake. On the level, I did fall asleep two or three times and wouldn't wake up until Molly started uphill, or went down a short grade.

Molly was always very alert; she never let any pack animal around her. She would reach down and try her best to bite my dog as he raced past in pursuit of a ground squirrel or rabbit. When I had to stop to adjust a pack on the trail, Molly would stand and wait for me. She kept the other stock in line, never tolerating any foolishness.

After several miles of sleepy traveling, on a turn in the trail, everything seemed to happen all at once. A squirrel ran into a hole and Snoopy proceeded to dig. The dirt flew across the trail, peppering a hollow stump that contained a potent bees nest. The hollow stump became alive with furious insects just as

I rode up, half asleep. Molly got stung several times in the first split second and shattered my wandering, sleepy thoughts. The three pack animals and the extra saddle horse were next. Nobody got by without getting stung. Snoopy rolled and tumbled down the hillside, trying to dislodge the bees from his belly. Tom narrowly missed kicking the daylights out of him as he went by. I knocked four yellow jackets off Molly's neck and she settled down. Dillon started kicking in a short circle, turning on his front feet as he went. The other animals were kicking and running into each other. Smokey got knocked down.

As soon as everybody got straightened out, we headed down the trail at full speed. The mules were wringing their tails around. Snoopy passed everybody by as he sped along. He would run for a hundred feet or so, then duck his head down between his hind legs to bite at a yellow jacket. He would roll like a black ball for several feet, then do the same thing over again. I didn't get stung one time, but nearly fell off the horse laughing at the commotion.

When we arrived at Lodgepole that evening, my family greeted me with more fire news. So far there were twenty-one fires on our district alone. The largest one was over a hundred acres and was burning in heavy timber on the Middle Fork of the Rogue River. Logging and sawmill crews had been called to help. When I talked to Doug on the phone, he told me to get some rest because from here on I would be having a rough time. I ate a quick supper and went to bed.

After about four hours sleep, the phone rang; it was 1:00 a.m. Someone told me to dress and head straight for Imnaha and check in for further instructions. It didn't take me long to cover the eight miles to Imnaha. I ate an apple and an orange on the way; no telling how long it would be before any food showed up.

Imnaha Corral

Imnaha Guard Station was deserted except for a new fellow, Ken, who was waiting for instructions before setting up a fire camp at another location. The regular guard, my old friend Tom Cook, had been sent to Bessie Creek Shelter to do the cooking for a fire camp there. Every lookout in the country was about done in from lack of sleep. Fires were every where, and only part of them were manned. After they spotted the fires and turned them in, they were constantly on the alert observing what the fires were doing. Also, the lookouts were the only means of communication for many of the fire fighters.

I called headquarters and Doug told me there would be two low-boys coming in shortly. A low-boy is a long low semi-flat-bed trailer constructed to transport the heavy D-7 and D-8 bulldozers that are used in logging operations. When a fire is out of control, the tractors are used to build fireline. They are driven onto the low-boys and transported to the fire.

At 4:00 in the morning, Doug called again, and said the low-boys wouldn't get to Imnaha until much later. The road they were traveling was narrow and on a turn crossing Spring Creek, the driver had had to unload one of the bulldozers and widen the road to accommodate the low-boy. When they crossed Spring Creek Bridge, the second low-boy had fallen through the bridge and into the creek. Again they unloaded one of the machines to pull the low-boy out of the creek.

At 8:00 o'clock, Doug called again and told me there would be two hundred crew men at Imnaha by 6:00 in the evening for supper. My job would be to lay out a camp. Things would have to happen fast to meet such a demand. There was on hand enough equipment to cook for a twenty-five man crew, and no food at all. The last part of his message was that instead of guiding the tractors to the fire, I was to set up the entire camp as the equipment and supplies rolled in. I had never seen a camp this size before. Common sense was going to have to be my guide. A fire doesn't wait for experts to put it out.

The first step was to locate a place to cook and serve food. Then stake out a sleeping area and a place to dig some latrines. Parking would also be a problem. There were many things to think about all at once. Soon a Forest Service carry-all rolled in with six men. Right behind it was a big van with cooking equipment, including gas stoves, portable tables, pans and kettles like I had never seen before. A refrigerator van brought a house-full of food. Another large truck arrived with enough fire-fighting tools to outfit three hundred men and the equipment needed to keep it in shape. Right behind that was a big sedan with four women and a man in it. They were the cooks who had come to take over the kitchen and organize things for the best efficiency. When the last item was unloaded and stowed away, the six helpers and I got to test out some of the first food the five cooks prepared.

Meanwhile, a big cattle truck hauled all my horses and mules to Imnaha. I would pack quantities of food and supplies to several fires upcountry. I went out to the barn, caught Molly and curried her down while she ate her oats. Then I tossed my saddle on her, cinched it up loosely and went for a short ride to settle my nerves. When we returned from our jaunt, there was a message for me to call John Fuiten, the District Clerk at the Butte Falls Ranger Station. He was a busy man trying to keep track of everything that was ordered and received, not to mention those articles that were back-ordered.

I called John to see what he had on his mind. He gave me a clear picture of all the fires on the district and in the adjacent country and a list of the many articles that would have to be packed in by mule. It was a sure thing that the job he outlined was too big for one packer. John asked me how many mule skinners and horses I would need to do the job. It would take four more men with saddle horses and at least two pack animals completely outfitted with each man. Packers were hard to find, but John scrounged them up in short order. In just a little while, Les Bradshaw drove up; and a moment later, Jim West, the horseshoer who took care of our horseshoeing work, came along. A truck was on its way bringing their saddle horses and pack stock.

By that time, the Middle Fork fire had reached two hundred acres in size; and our first drag would be to pack several loads of equipment to the lower end of the fire in the Middle Fork Canyon. There were two Edwards fire pumps which John had ordered from Portland, about two miles of 1 1/2 inch fire hose, several rubber, 150 gallon Haridyke tanks, boxes and pack sacks filled with small articles and one load of C rations. I knew there would be about ten mule-loads of equipment alone.

In about two hours, two more packers drove in, hauling their horses. They were local people who didn't have far to drive. Everett Keene was a short wiry man who knew packing inside and out. He walked as straight as a ramrod and he sat on his horse like the expert he was. Dwight Moore was a tall lanky cowboy who had spent many hours on a horse but hadn't done much packing. It really made me feel good to be with such men and it was interesting to listen to the stories they had to tell. Before these guys showed up, I felt like a loner.

Before suppertime, Jim West and Les Bradshaw's horses had arrived in a stock truck. Jim was a tall man who was another expert with stock, no matter what needed to be done. He talked slow and quiet, which meant business where a horse was concerned. Les was another tall lanky cattleman, who was pretty wise around stock. That evening, we were five men set apart from everyone else. We wore our chaps and spurs and two of us carried pistols. We were ready to ride the moment the call came through.

By now, the relief crews were in camp, had supper, and were on their way to the fire. The day crews were beginning to come in after a hectic day, tired and hungry. Every passing firefighter eyed us packers who sat in the yard near a gas lantern eating our supper. Occasionally one would come over to talk but wouldn't stick around for long. They felt uncomfortable because we talked a different language. Britt Ash, our District Ranger, was the only one who looked forward to sitting down with us and spinning a few yarns.

There were fifteen head of saddle and pack stock, that was a little shy of what we needed. We were talking about our packing problems when a curious, cocky logger, noticing my pistol, made a remark about drug-store cowboys. He grinned at me through tobacco stained teeth and asked me how come I wore the gun. I told him I shot porcupines and an occasional marauding bear. Either one was hard on pack rigging and a packers food. There were times when a pack horse or mule went over a cliff and broke his leg or back, and it would have to be shot to prevent suffering. (To this day I wonder if I could have shot one of my mules.) I looked him straight in the eye when I told him I hadn't put any smart loggers out of their misery yet, but the time might be just around the

corner. I met this man on the trail the next day and he asked what chances he might have of getting a steady job with the Forest Service and work for me!

We got some rest that night and made a few short pack trips the following day. The fire equipment for the big fire had to be hauled from Portland and other places around the country. It would come up the Bessie Creek Road to Kerby Creek Spur about a quarter of a mile up the road where the trailhead to the Middle Fork was located. We put saddles on our horses and proceeded to catch and saddle the pack stock. It was a beautiful sight when we left the barnyard at Imnaha and headed north. There must have been thirty or forty people from fire camp standing around when we headed up the trail with five lively saddle horses and nine pack animals. Molly led the way with Tom and Dillon following closely behind. It was about five miles to where we would meet the truckload of equipment.

When we got there, we heard the truck shift gears as it climbed up the steep hill toward the trailhead. The lighter loads would be put on first. There were six loads of cotton-jacketed rubberlined hose. The pack stock could carry a thousand feet of the dry 1-1/2 inch hose each. The smaller miscellaneous articles and the C rations were put on two animals. Old Tom Mule was elected to carry the two big Edwards pumps, one on each side. They weighed about a hundred and forty pounds each. I tied Tom's load down just before dark. We took a long look at each pack animal and mounted up for a long hard ride through the night. We would not be able to use flashlights around the pack stock. They were jumpy enough without anything like that.

We rode downhill in the gathering darkness and into tall timber that shut out all light. We could see nothing, not even the white pack covers on the pack stock. Good humored laughter and small talk passed back and forth along the line as we rode. Les Bradshaw was out in front leading one pack horse, watching for trouble along the trail. We knew every time he got slapped in the face with a low limb, because he would stop singing in the middle of a word and cuss a little. Then he would proceed on down the trail like nothing had happened.

As we moved along the dark trail, there was a commotion about four horses ahead of me; and I knew from the sounds that we had stirred up a yellow jacket nest. I was sure we would have a lot of trouble because every horse and mule from there on back would likely get stung. There was no way to get above or below the trail to escape the hostile little insects. My horse was stung several times, but I managed to keep her under control. Poor old Tom got the full wrath of the yellow jackets because he couldn't travel fast enough with his heavy load. He waddled like a duck for a hundred yards. We didn't dare turn on a flashlight to try to scrape the bees off him. Dwight Moore was the last packer to ride past the nest. He cussed a little and there was a lot of thumping and bumping back there someplace in the dark.

Each packer had tied down his own loads. If a pack came loose, he could figure out his lash in the dark and put things back together. Just above Geyser Springs the trail levels off some. You could hear the roar of the water as we approached the spring. Geyser Springs is one of dozens of ice-cold mountain springs that gush from the mountainside, forming its own creek that cascades noisily down the steep terrain toward the river. About a mile downriver from

Geyser is another spring – Wapiti Falls. It is even more spectacular in size and environment than Geyser. The water comes gushing from the top of a sixty foot cliff in several places. Seen in the daytime as the afternoon sun shines through the mist, it creates the most beautiful of rainbows. Where the falling water hits the ground far below, is formed narrow, deep, rivulets winding through thick green moss toward the river. Best of all, the trail doesn't go anywhere near that beautiful place.

About a hundred feet beyond Geyser Springs we rode around a turn in the trail and there across the deep canyon, on the far hillside, was the fire, now over two hundred and fifty acres and still burning out of control. We stopped to watch the most spectacular fireworks a man could ever hope to see. Maybe you might call it a beautiful monster. A forest was dying right before our eyes. A forest fire at night is one of the most spectacular sights. During my life, I've heard a little now and then about hell-fire. As I looked across the canyon, I wondered if it burned with as much velocity as the forest fire we were watching.

We sat there in our saddles and watched with awe as preheated fuel in the path of the fire would ignite. A half dozen places, five to ten acres in size, would fairly explode all at once. Several unburned islands of trees inside the fire would crown out and burn. The sound of the roaring fire was like a lot of jet airplanes running a race, even though the fire was a mile and a half away from us. Every time a spot flared up, the pack stock spooked. They sensed the danger ahead and were reluctant to venture on into the deep, dark canyon below.

From here, it would take at least two more hours to reach the fire. The pumps would pull water from the river and help hold the fireline at the bottom and up each side. The fire fighters on the line were trying to control the blaze by building fire trails by hand and throwing damp dirt to suppress the hot spots near the edge. The fire was three miles away. Most of the trail down from Geyser Springs was merely a shelf dug out along the mountainside. There were lots of switchbacks so the trail wouldn't be so steep.

As we lost altitude, the sound of the fire became less distinct and the roar of the Middle Fork of the Rogue River became more audible. Two packers were trying their best to sing a song together, two were talking, and I just sat in my saddle listening, happy to be a part of all this action. I could feel the muscles in Molly's body as she felt for every step down the pitch black trail. Molly was pure white, but I couldn't see her. The stars overhead weren't visible because of the heavy canopy formed by the big trees we rode through.

All at once everybody stopped. One of Jim West's pack horses had lost his load. Jim didn't say much as he felt his way back past several head of mules and horses to find the slipped pack. We couldn't see Jim, but knew full well what was taking place. In about half an hour, he was repacked and not one roll of hose got away from him. I suppose the hitch wouldn't have looked too fancy in the daylight, but anyhow it didn't come loose again. We had just got under way when Les Bradshaw got slapped in the face with a chinquapin limb that knocked his hat off. He got down to get it, if he could find where it fell. As he groped around in the dark, he made a sad discovery. His horse was standing on his nearly new 5X Beaver Stetson!

The roar of the river was louder now. It was almost deafening. Some of the stock had never waded deep water before. If they spooked and stampeded in

the middle of the crossing, the horses and mules were sure to fall when they stepped on the slick rocks. We would have to cut their loads loose so they could get up. Molly was a natural born leader. She knew where and how to cross the swift current. Tom and Dillon knew too, especially Dillon. In the spring, I had seen Dillon swim across a couple of times because he crossed too far downstream. I sat tight and waited for anything to happen.

The water was cold as it splashed against me. My left boot filled rapidly on the upstream side before I could pull my foot up. Molly and Tom crossed like it was broad daylight. Brownie, the strawberry roan mare, was about to step into the water when she decided maybe she could jump across. Everett Keene was an expert rider and he too was ready for anything that might happen. Brownie reared high on her hind legs and lunged forward. She landed downstream in a deep swirling pool. Everett got soaked to the belt but he stayed put.

Brownie went straight upstream until she reached the spot where Molly had crossed then turned right as if she was on a trail and crossed to the other bank. Everett had some more trouble at the trail junction above the river. Brownie wanted to turn right toward Imnaha, and Everett insisted on turning left toward the fire. The mare reared up and started over backwards. Everett dove from the saddle and over a steep bank on the lower side of the trail. As he scrambled to stay out of the mare's way, he hung onto the bridle reins with one hand and held tight to his hat with the other. By the time Everett got through with Brownie, she was more than glad to go up the trail toward the fire.

The next two miles were easy going. Tom mule was at the head of the string. There were nine pack animals and five packers. The smoke-filled canyon was spooky. Huge flare-ups were prevalent on the side of the steep mountain forest fire. We rounded a turn in the trail and saw at least forty men walking toward us. I threw Tom's lead rope down and touched Molly with my left spur. She lunged into a dead run toward the fire fighters. They stopped and looked me over in disbelief. My white horse pranced back and forth in front of the group. I told them to stay put and turn off their hat-mounted flashlights. If they came in too close, the animals would spook and cause a colossal runaway. The foreman understood and asked his men to sit down. I turned to ride back to where my pack string was waiting. Before my eyes was a sight that maybe no man had ever seen. The flareups from the fire caused bright reflections in the dense smoke. It showed a brilliant orange color and turned to light gray as the blowups subsided. The shimmering obscure light and darkness beyond, caused a ghostly scene. The rugged mule skinners were holding the spooked pack animals in check. The long-eared mules and the horses were frightened.

What I saw reminded me of the song, "Ghost Riders In The Sky". I witnessed a sight that no one could get a picture of. If I told what I saw maybe someone could imagine the scene and do a painting.

That night on the Middle Fork fire was one of the most hectic pack trips I was ever on. But the men I rode with, the ghostly scene and the unexpected events made it all worth while. I was lucky to be there.

Two of us pulled the pumps off Tom the first thing. While the other animals

were being unloaded, I pulled Tom's pack saddle off and looked him over for rubs and to see if any sticks had got under the saddle pad. Molly never left my side. She was constantly nudging me to move faster so we could depart from the smoke-filled canyon. She and all the other horses and mules were scared because they knew something was wrong. Tom and Dillon settled down whenever they were near me. When I tied up their halter ropes to their pack saddles, they followed me as closely as they could.

It was a quick ride back to Imnaha. Even though it was still dark, it seemed good to know that we had made a pack trip that gave each packer another story to tell. We had got banged around enough to tell we had done something, but no one was hurt. As for me, it gave me such a good feeling to know that I was actually doing something related to the good old days, just like my ancestors had done in the same country a hundred years before.

We were very tired, but happy thoughts were turning through my mind as we went down the last hundred yard stretch of trail toward the corral and barn. Imnaha was a beehive of activity. All at once, Molly reared up on her hind legs, snorted and almost bucked me off. There were about a hundred tired and worn-out fire fighters bedded down in the small opening we were headed across. They were snuggled down in paper sleeping bags. Molly had nearly stepped on the first man. He woke up very startled and began to holler as he rolled over and over trying to get out of the way. The poor guy was scared half out of his wits. Startled sleepers got out of our way as the spooky horses and mules raced past and on to the corral. On the evenings that followed, I noticed that other fire fighters changed their bedding grounds.

I always took very special care of Molly, Tom and Dillon. While they enjoyed a feeding of oats, I unsaddled them and rubbed their tired backs. It gave me a chance to look for rubs and cuts. They had a special place of their own in the horse stalls at the barn, in out of the cool night air. When I walked through the saddle room and on into the haymow, I fell down over some more fire fighters. One of them argued with me because his bed, consisting of two broken bales of hay, was going to be breakfast for some hungry mules.

In fact, he crawled out of his bed and started to throw me out. But when he turned his flashlight on me, he stopped in his tracks. Then he turned, rolled up his bed and walked out, cussing under his breath. He told me later that with my six-shooter strapped to my left side,gun butt forward, I looked too tough to handle right then. He claimed I reminded him of an oldtime horse rustler right out of the roaring 1800's. My heavy leather chaps and coat were covered with dust and I hadn't shaved for three days. My big hat was sweat stained and coated with dust. The only thing that reflected was my stainless steel spurs and white, bone handled, gun butt.

Talking and laughing, the five of us walked toward the bright lights of Imnaha Fire Camp with our spurs jingling. When we walked into full view, all activity came to a halt and we were suddenly the center of attention. Several officials greeted me and asked how we had made out. The camp boss assigned one of the cooks to feed us and to stand by until we finished eating. We sat down at a table inside the house. The young girl who put our food on the table was very good at her job. She made sure there was plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, steak and potatoes and to top it off, we had our choice of three

different kinds of pie. I took a chunk out of each one, with ice cream on the apple pie. It might be a week before we saw food like that again!

We had a chance to sleep for about three hours before the Fire Boss woke us up at a predetermined time. Today we would split up with Jim West, Les Bradshaw and Dwight Moore going to Bessie Creek Shelter while Everett and I would head for the Blue Canyon country. We got word by radio that our cargo would be late, so I sent the three packers to Bessie Creek to stand by. My first concern was half a sack of oats for Molly, Tom and Dillon and second was food for me. I hunted up our favorite cook and told her what food I wanted and how it should be packed.

A food order was ready and waiting to be packed to the lower end of the Middle Fork fire. It wasn't too heavy and three pack animals would be enough to do the job. If I got right at it, the fire fighters would be eating about 12:30. My little cook knew about this before I did and had a special packet of food fixed up for me.

When I left camp, my saddle bags were bulging with fresh tomatoes, peaches and apricots, hot coffee, two large sandwiches and half an apple pie. As I had instructed the girl, she had found several empty tin cans and washed them with soap and hot water. When they were dry and cooled off, she put two tomatoes in one can which fit in tight, then taped a cover over the open end. She packed the peaches and apricots the same way. A five pound ham can was perfect for the sandwiches and the half apple pie was protected by a cardboard box made to order. I rolled my thermos of hot coffee in my coat and tied it behind my saddle.

Molly was ready to hit the trail. She loved to be the leader and did a fine job of it, too. There was enough food on Tom, Dillon and Smokey to feed 120 men, plus a ration of oats for the stock. As I took my time riding up the trail, I enjoyed the smell of the slick-leaf brush and a sweet honey-like smell that seemed to be mixed in like chocolate streaks in vanilla ice cream.

When we crossed Fool's Creek Flat, a crew of over a hundred men were walking to fire camp after a rough sixteen hours on the fireline. They would rest up and then go back to the fire at daylight the next day. Several fellows asked how they could get a job as my helper. I really believe that if anyone of those guys ever had an opportunity to ride with me as a packer, they would soon be glad to return to the fireline where they would at least get to rest some and get a drink of water when they got thirsty. None of them realized what a back-breaking, thankless job, packing really was..

When Molly rounded a turn in the trail at the northwest corner of the fire, she was startled to see a crowd of men in her path. There were at least fifty fire fighters who had already come down from the fireline to get lunches. They were informed by forest radio that food was on its way and how soon it would get there.

By now the fire was under control and mopping up would be a tedious job. The firemen started at the fireline and would work their way toward the center until the last spark was out or until it rained.

As the food was being unpacked, more men arrived on the scene. Molly and the pack stock enjoyed their oats as the men ate their lunches. All eyes were on me as I pulled my saddle bags from the saddle on Molly's back. The

stock were tied up about a hundred yards away from the large group of people. My strides were short and choppy caused from pounding the saddle for many hours. One man mentioned that I sure looked the part as he noticed my movements .

I chose a spot to eat lunch where most of the men could see me. There was a large boulder about two feet high and flat enough to be used as a table. No one paid too much attention to all the cans that were taken from my saddle bags; but when they saw the contents, there were several men looking at their own lunches for a fast comparison. I was surely in a good place to get mobbed and robbed of my packer's lunch.

When a mule skinner gets to a place where there is food, he eats slow and puts down a lot, because hard telling when he might get to eat again.

Molly stepped lively as she lead the mules back to Imnaha. She knew there would be plenty of hay and drinking water for her. Down through the Lodgepole pines ahead, the roof of the barn began to take shape. Molly wanted to run, but I held her in.

Everett Keene heard me coming and met us at the gate. As he swung it open, Snoopy ran to greet him with a friendly growl. While my horse was being taken care of, Everett told me what my next drag would be.

Up the South Fork of Rogue River and high on the Skyline Trail were three fires. They were named Blue Canyon Number One, Two and Three. Numbers One and Three needed supplies. My fire would be Number One, where a two mule load of supplies were needed. Number Three was two miles from the road, up the South Fork Trail. It was located about one fourth of a mile north east of the two mile sign. From the trail to the fire was up hill over mounds of rock and cracked up lava dikes.

Everett was a tough man and very agile. He said he would like to make that trip. It would be short and easy. I was glad to get the midnight drag with Molly and my two black Government mules. We wouldn't get back to Imnaha until late the next day.

The horses and mules ate and rested. I got a pack cover and found me a shade tree to spread it out and take a nap. Two hours slipped by and suddenly I woke up for no reason. About then a truck swung around a turn and rolled into camp. I stood up, stretched, then meandered down to watch as it was unloaded.

Everett walked over and stood beside me. There were several articles labeled Blue Canyon Number One. We saw an ice chest that said Blue Canyon Number Three. Everett gave me a quick look and said something about how he hoped the cook had a good supply of Wheaties on hand. Actually it's contents weighed less than fifty pounds. The two of us would hit the trail and pound leather for most of the night. But to us, there was no such thing as "Mission Impossible".

I saddled up and rode down just outside the Fire Camp to be close to the things that had to go. The young cook was again filling my saddlebags with food, like she had done before. Just before I climbed into the saddle, she came over with a couple dozen stale sandwiches and divided them between Molly and my mules.She also gave me a quarter of a chocolate cream pie covered with an inch of whipped cream and a mug of hot coffee to top it off. I had a notion

to give her a big hug but there was just too many people around.

The loads on Tom and Dillon were light, but bulky. It was mostly sleeping bags and tarps. When loading them, I had unrolled each bag and laid it over the top of the mules, piling them on until I couldn't get anymore up. When the loads were tied down, the mules looked like camels. They were done up like two Christmas packages complete with ears and tails.

Not long after we left camp a full moon rose slowly above the mountains. At first there were huge trees silhouetted against it, and I felt as if a spell had been cast over me and my mules. Then it broke free of the dark trees and floated above in the sky. I felt excited and alert.

Snoopy was dashing back and forth, looking for something to chase. He found a porcupine but kept his distance, knowing that those things hurt if he got too close. The night air was fresh and cool, and it felt so good after the hot day. I rode all night long. In fact, the moon came up, traveled across the sky and disappeared behind the mountain. What a beautiful ride it was.

My two mules were loaded light and they traveled along the dusty path quite well. It was after dark by the time we headed up the Red Lake Trail. In a couple of hours we should be heading South on the Cascade Divide.

It is a steady climb for the first mile or so. But from Doyal Springs to Wickiup Junction, the going gets better. After that the trail passes many rock out-croppings and small cliff-like places. Must be old lava flows, half covered with pumice soil, but the going was easy.

I was thankful for the bright moonlit night. The trail passed around the south side of a slight knoll. To my right was South Fork Canyon. It seemed like quite a distance down the gradual slope toward the river.

From far away, toward the bottom of the dark canyon, I heard a strange sound and pulled up to listen. Down the mountain side, over a mile away, came a long "cowboy type" wail. At first it sounded like a lost or injured fire fighter. Up on the side of the mountain side were two hungry fire fighters who heard the same call.

Everett's voice was loud and clear. The night breeze carried it up and over the ridges and it echoed back and forth through the canyons. The air currents carried a welcome message to the two tired and worn out men. They answered his call. I could hear them clearly.

Everett climbed up and over one lava dike after another, and between each one there was a stunted tangle of Chinquapin shrubs with lots of burrs. At least there were no rattle snakes or poison oak to worry about. Number Three fire was out there some place.

His voice was answered each time he hollered. Sounded like he might be driving cattle. Finally everything was quiet, not even a breeze blowing. The fire fighters had hollered him in, and no doubt by now they were enjoying the taste of real food at last.

I rode down the Skyline Trail to a rocky little hill where a white cloth tied to a limb marked the spot where we should leave the trail and ride in an easterly direction. I rode into the timber for about half an hour and had pulled up to rest when I heard voices ahead and saw the flicker of a fire. In another five minutes we pulled up and greeted two tired dirty fire fighters. I asked where everybody was, and they seemed surprised. They were the only men on the fire. They had

sleeping bags, food and plenty of water. Someone had goofed and sent me to the wrong fire.

They told me that an airplane had flown over and dropped supplies to them that morning. The plane couldn't get close enough to drop supplies to FIRE NO. 2 because of wind and steep rocky ledges below the drop area. Supplies dropped there would have been blown far down into the canyon and probably never recovered. That was why they sent me in with supplies by pack string. It would soon be daylight, but I made the most of the darkness remaining by spreading out all the sleeping bags one on top of the other, and then crawled into the top one. Boy, was that like sleeping on a feather bed!

I was packed up and in the saddle soon after daylight. Molly acted like she would like to unload me. In about an hour, I walked up to a makeshift contraption that looked like a hobo camp. The men had built a shelter from poles, pieces of burlap and tree boughs. Manny Poole, the Fire Boss, was the first to appear. I don't blame Molly for snorting and jumping sideways because not only did he need a shave and some water to wash up with, he was hungry, tired and sleepy and just a little out of sorts.

The crew was so mad about what happened that I don't think they heard a thing I said for ten minutes after we got there. They had slept on the ground and hadn't had anything to eat for more than two days. Soon they were filled with good wholesome food and saw most everything in a different light.

I repacked the mules, climbed up in the saddle and rode away. When we got to the Skyline Trail, we turned north to the Red Lake Trail. The day was hot and I grew drowsy. Not long after Molly turned left onto the Red Lake Trail, Snoopy jumped up behind my saddle. His feet were getting sore. He would have to stay home the next trip or two until they could heal up. He had been on the go with me since we left Lodgepole last Sunday morning, and it was now 1:00 p.m. Thursday. I'd been in the saddle most of the time.

Several hours later I rode through the gate at Lodgepole. There were no horses or mules to come running to meet me. They were all gone, packing something or somebody into the high country. But even more strange, none of my family met me at the corral fence. I took care of the stock and walked toward the house. The family car was gone, in fact the place was completely deserted. I opened the door and it rattled as it bumped against the inside wall. Snoopy and I walked through the house. The jingle of my spurs echoed through the empty rooms as I went from one room to the other. A sinking feeling crept over me.

On the stone cold kitchen stove, my wife had left a note in the most conspicuous place, fastened to the coffee pot. It said, "Come and see us when you ride in. We had to move back to Butte Falls yesterday so Don could go to school."

The house was cold, I was tired and hungry, there was no noise and boy, was it lonesome. I felt like kicking my dog just to hear something holler. I called fire camp and told them another mission had been accomplished and I would be right over to eat supper.

By now all the fires were out or cooling down. The big fire had been controlled at 270 acres. Crews were still mopping up at the most dangerous points. Soon after the day crew had been fed their evening meal, the word

came through that the men could be released to go home. In two hours time, 150 men were getting ready to leave. Fire Time Slips had to be checked and double checked to make sure every man got paid for the amount of back-breaking hours he had worked. Three of the five cooks were released. The radio technician, Harold Howard, started his long tedious job of dismantling his equipment. His job wasn't too hard physically, but the mental strain and long hours made up for it. He had been available, or working 24 hours a day. Later in the evening, the timekeepers packed up and took off. Then one of the two cooks who were left got sick and went home, too.

Gordon Kirkland from our Supervisor's Office was a member of the team of timekeepers. He was different from most of the brass and always treated me like I was someone special. Gordon raked me over the coals once because I turned in 10 hours for an 18 hour day. From then on, he was real interested in where I was, what I was doing and when I started and returned from a trip. This big lightning bust was the first time I ever got a nickels worth of over-time for anything! I hated to see Gordon leave.

Things seemed quiet, almost too quiet. I walked up to the barn to check on the stock. When I whistled, they came running toward me. They knew they would get another big feeding of oats. That was a sure way to keep them civilized. None of them was skinned up or had any bad saddle rubs. I felt relieved about that. While still looking them over, I heard someone calling for me over the intercom. The fire boss wanted to see me. I wondered where they would send me this time.

I walked down to the fire camp, and he was waiting for me in the front room of Imnaha house with two cups of coffee poured. First he congratulated me on a job well done. Then he apologized about having to change my routine. He asked me to change my boots and hat and prepare to take a twenty-man crew to the top end of the big fire for night patrol. We would be leaving as soon as fresh men arrived at camp. Harold Howard had asked for a weather forecast for the local area. The weather watchers predicted rain, which should start around midnight and continue throughout the coming week. This was good news, but it would make things mighty sloppy. The fire roads were rutted-out in the pumice soil. The dust was so deep, a truck would drag on the center of the roads. A rainstorm would turn all this powdery dust into mud in a very short time.

By 6:30 in the evening, the men had arrived and we started on our way to the fire. We rode in 4-wheel drive trucks owned by local loggers. At the fire, I pulled everyone together for a safety session and to discuss problems we might be confronted with. I would be available and could be contacted by radio any time. My crew were local men, mostly loggers. They were tough. I felt at home with them since I was an ex-logger myself. One young man stayed with me in case I had to get in touch with some men who didn't have a radio. He could take a message to them for me.

It began to get cold and the clouds overhead were getting thicker. Smoke from the fire was blowing right up over us and sometimes it was almost unbearable. Carl was tired after a hard day in the logging woods. He sat down near a warming fire, which didn't bother me until I looked over and saw that he was now lying down and sparks were flying all around him. I woke him up

and cautioned him about the fire. In a short time, he was right back where he had been before and I would have to repeat my warning. This happened several times until it seemed to me I was constantly pulling him away from the fire so he wouldn't get burned. He was such a good natured kid that I couldn't get mad at him. It wasn't till later that I learned that he was much too young to be a fire fighter. The minimum age limit is 18 years old.

At 11:00 p.m., we felt the first rain drops on our faces as we were looking toward the sky. I took off my hat so the rain would hit my bald spot and sure enough — it was starting to rain. I called down to the men below and they said they felt a few drops, but were standing in tall timber. I told them to come on up and we would see what was taking place. They arrived at the top of the fire in threes and fours. Soon all twenty men were accounted for. We were beginning to get wet.

I called Fire Camp and told them the news. Several of the younger men were doing a rain dance that would put an Indian tribe to shame. It must really have took,because in half an hour there was a regular downpour. The transportation coming to pick us up was having an awful time driving up the steep road. They finally made it and we headed home, The big rigs slipped and slid down the mountain. I was thankful for the deep ruts which guided the vehicles along.

At Imnaha, everything was under cover and there was no one around to greet us. Soon all the men had driven away and there I was all alone, not a living soul around. I couldn't believe it. I fed the stock plenty of hay and latched onto some leftover fire grub for my early morning breakfast. Snoopy was curled up in a tight ball in my car. The rain was really coming down. At Lodgepole, Molly, Tom and Dillon met me as I drove in and fed them some oats and put plenty of hay in the mangers. Then after a quick look inside the house, me and my dog headed for Butte Falls.

This was the end of a long siege of fire fighting. I was alone at the beginning and was the last one to drive away when it was over. Boy, talk about tired! I drove up to my home about 3:00 a.m. My wife heard the car and met me at the door. She put on the coffee pot and I laid out some goodies on the kitchen table. Don got up and was delighted to see me and what I had brought. Tricia and Janna were next and Leslie came along last. I always brought the kids some goodies from any fire I ever went on. It was exciting for my children to open up my saddle bags and explore the contents. We finally all got to bed by 5:00 a.m. Don had a big day ahead of him at school.

CHAPTER 19

SNOW STORM ON THE CASCADE DIVIDE

It rained all that weekend; and that was a good excuse for all the fire fighters to rest up on Monday. The weather was still a little rainy and the roads were slick; but I drove to Lodgepole Tuesday morning and fed Molly, Tom and Dillon. Then went to Imnaha to feed the rest of the horses. That afternoon Molly would carry me to Imnaha as the two mules followed along behind. The next day might be a long one because all the fire equipment would have to be packed out from the big Middle Fork fire.

Wednesday morning a six man crew followed me to Imnaha. They would head on in, and start rolling up miles of fire hose. By noon, there would be an awful pile of stuff near the trail where it would be easy for me to pack up on my mules for the trip out.

The two big Edwards Pumps were the first to go. It took three men to load them on Tom. Everything else was light enough for me to handle alone. Dillon and Smokey could carry 800 feet of wet fire hose each. I made three trips out of the river bottom to the end of an old road about three miles away from Imnaha. The pile of equipment at the road was growing. At the fire, the piles of supplies and equipment were getting smaller. The weather had slacked up a little, but we still got wet. The men finished their job by early afternoon and pulled out for Butte Falls.

It was 6:00 p.m. when we headed down to make our last drag, which was four mule-loads of fire hose; 3,200 feet, almost three quarters of a mile of it. Right above the river, Smokey reared back and went end-over-end into a deep ravine. She was stubborn about stepping over a log in the trail. She put both front feet against it and pulled back. When the lead rope came loose, her hind legs crumpled and away she went. The big smokey colored mare landed right side up among a dense patch of hemlock trees. All that was showing was the top of her head and big, blinking eyes. She was scared. Twenty minutes later we were back on the trail and going good.

Smokey was a mare I hadn't liked too well until then. She was nothing more than a work horse that should never have been under a saddle. For two years I couldn't figure out why Doug had bought her. She wasn't worth the hay she ate. After I started using her as a pack mare, she pulled so many crazy stunts I liked to take her along just for laughs. Toward the end of my years at Lodgepole, I got her so she wasn't too bad to ride, but it took a lot of doing.

We pulled up to the last pile of equipment by the trail at the bottom of the big fire and started to load up. It was dark when I tied down the last load. The ride out of the canyon was dark and lonely. What a contrast from a week before when there was so much excitement and activity on the same trail. I thought of the big crews of men who stepped aside to let me pass, and how some of them wanted to be my helper. One of the largest crews had been bossed by

an old timer named Ivan Short. He admired my job but felt more comfortable doing the job he had. He was a longtime foreman on the Union Creek District.

Molly shied at the huge piles of fire hose when we reached our unloading spot. It took about half an hour to unload, do up lash ropes and get ready to ride out. I had told Doug to leave food and bedding at Imnaha. We would be late getting in and it would save me a lot of trouble if I just stayed there and rode over to Lodgepole the next day.

At Imnaha things didn't look right. Boy was it quiet. It caused me to check things out before unsaddling the stock. It might just be that someone shut everything up and tied it down for the winter. In that case, it would mean another five mile ride that night.

To my surprise the shutters were on all the windows and doors. A tin cover had been placed over the chimney and the waterline to the house had been disconnected and drained. Imnaha had been winterized. I found a crowbar in the shop and pried the door shutter off. The inside of the house was cold. There was nothing. Even the telephone was disconnected from the main line.

The more I thought about it, the madder I got. Why had he given up on me like that? Anything could have happened to me out there alone with five head of stock and now having to ride five more miles before we could eat and get some rest. The stock was tired too. As I headed down the trail toward Imnaha Creek crossing, there were a good many things going through my mind on how to get even. Number one was that I wouldn't check in; and if anyone called, I wouldn't answer the phone. To thunder with the whole blamed outfit. One thing I decided to do which would be in my favor, was to take the remaining three head of horses with me. They were the lucky ones that didn't have to work that day.

The two creek crossings were high, but no animal went down. The river crossing was a little worse but nothing bad happened. Molly was as surefooted as a goat. On the south side of the river, there is a series of switchbacks up the steep side slope to a heavily timbered pumice flat. At the top, it's just two miles to Lodgepole.

Ahead of me there was a mad scramble of some animal running down the trail and a loud thumping scratching noise as it climbed a pine tree. Molly reared up and got quite excited. I grabbed Snoopy and held onto him. I never knew what the animal was but supposed it was a bear cub. Snoopy had been riding behind my saddle from Imnaha because of the high water in the streams. An owl hooted loud and clear just ahead of me and another one answered him behind me on the opposite side of the trail. We were being surrounded. The two Great Horned Owls followed me clear to Lodgepole. One would hoot and the other would answer, like they were playing a game of some kind. I didn't appreciate their sense of humor. It sounded just a little spooky.

We trotted into Lodgepole about 2:00 in the morning. I took care of the stock; and as me and my dog walked to the dark, empty house, the two owls still filled the night with their ghostly hooting. Really,it sounded sort of good and I was glad for their company. I cooked up a bait of food for Snoopy and me, then we both went to sleep. My wife wouldn't worry about me; maybe she'd be a little anxious, but no real worrying. The phone never rang.

In the morning, Snoopy and I had a leisurely breakfast then fed the horses

and mules. About 10:00 o'clock I called Doug to see if he had missed me. I wasn't too polite and even hung up the receiver while he was telling me about another job he wanted done.

It had quit raining and the sun came out bright and hot. Everything was back to normal. The grass seemed greener and the creek was running. My mules and I had been to half of the twenty one fires the Butte Falls District took action on that Labor Day Weekend. Without my Government mules and Molly, it would have been impossible to accomplish all the things I had done.

For the next two days, I rode into all the back country fires and packed out tools, sleeping bags and many small articles. When the crews left their camps, they tossed the sleeping bags up over a small tree so the water would run off. Everything was dry and in good shape, not even a mouse nest in any of the bags. The weather continued hot. Everything dried out again, and we were right back in fire season once more. In fact, Doug sent patrolmen to the big fire to check for sleepers. They found several scattered all along the fireline. A crew was sent back to continue dry mop-up.

Two more fires took off where some careless campers had been. Doug sent me back to Bessie Rock, with a man to keep watch in case more fires took off. Lloyd Holmes was the lookout who got to do the honors of manning Bessie Rock. He left Lodgepole early in the morning, and drove his car to the end of the road, then hiked on in. The animals and birds were out in full force. Honey bees were working every plant and shrub. Hornets and yellow jackets were meaner then ever.

We had just started around a turn in the trail where it breaks over on the Red Blanket side of the mountain when Snoopy stirred up a yellow jacket nest, a real hot one. Molly got stung on the side of her head and she took off. I lost the lead rope and proceeded to settle down to some real riding. If we hadn't been going uphill, Molly might have bucked me off. Dillon's lead rope trailed back between his feet and Tom stepped on the end of it. The mule came to a halt. Both mules had stopped by the yellow jacket nest, which they hadn't noticed yet.

Tom was the first to get stung. He took off like he had been charged with dynamite. Dillon was slower to get the message and wouldn't get out of Tom's way. Tom raised up on his hind legs and jumped uphill above the trail. Dillon got stung about that time, and both mules were breaking all speed records as they ran, Tom on the bank above the trail and Dillon on the trail. They were one above the other, side by side. Finally the bank crumbled and Tom fell on top of Dillon and knocked him off the trail. Both mules went over the side. When they landed on their feet, they leaned heavy toward the hillside. The soft dirt let their feet cut deep and they climbed back to the trail, still running.

The yellow jacket that stung Molly was still stuck to her head just under the head-stall. I got down and brushed it off and stomped the dirty little thing into the ground. Lloyd had climbed uphill off the trail to get out of our way. We left him behind about half a mile. When the mules caught up, they stopped and tried to kick the stubborn yellow jackets off their bellies. I got down, took a stick and scraped them off. My mules would always come to me for help.

When Lloyd and I unloaded his food at the lookout, we looked to see how many eggs were broken. There were two eggs in the end of one carton that

were only shells. A small hole appeared in each shell and the inside was all gone. Apparently when Tom fell on Dillon, the two eggs fairly blew up. We discovered that every single article in the packbox had just a little bit of egg yolk on it. The two eggs were the only loss Lloyd had. I was sorry about that, but at least it made a good story to tell about Tom and Dillon. Those were the only two eggs my mules had broken all summer. They had packed at least 80 dozen of them, and as many as 10 dozen at a time.

Lloyd was a dependable man. He had been on Bessie Rock before and knew the country like the palm of his hand. He was so concerned about fire, I think he must have set his alarm clock so he could get up during the night at least every two hours. Each lookout was responsible for about 250,000 to 300,000 acres of timbered land. His job was an important one.

On the way back home, I stopped by the cold spring where Lloyd would get his drinking water. Dillon went on down the trail toward the truck. The tailgate was open. When Dillon got there, he walked up the ramp and went right into the truck, pack and all. The opening was wide enough for a mule, but not for one that still had his pack on. Boards splintered and the tailgate rod flew up in the air. When I got there, Dillon was standing in the truck and I suppose the old boy was wondering what the hold-up was.

Lodgepole was a lonesome, quiet place. We got in early and that was bad. It gave me too much time to feel the quietness and feel it closing in on me. For a man who was used to a lot of noise created by his children, it was something like this that really got to him. I wanted to go home. Instead, I occupied myself by patching pack saddles and looking over my horses and mules and rubbed them down. I cleaned out the barn and packed several loads of wood into the house. It took a lot of wood to fire up the heating stove and kitchen range.

When darkness closed in, Snoopy and I went to the house to cook supper. He was always excited when mealtime came around because he got about half of everything, including the dessert. My dog was a real partner. At this writing, he is over 14 years old. We fixed up a big frying pan full of fried potatoes and onions. They had to be well done before Snoopy would touch them. I fried several pork chops and made lots of gravy with the meat fryings. Then made an apple salad with plenty of nuts and of course a pot of good fresh coffee.

Snoopy ate his share of the potatoes, gravy and pork chops; but I had the salad and coffee all to myself. He did wait around for his part of the chocolate chip cookies before he curled up under my bed and went to sleep. No wonder he barked and growled in his sleep all night long. I finished my supper with a large bowl of fresh huckleberries smothered with cream and sugar. I'm not sure if this is very good to go to bed with a full stomach like that, but somehow it made me sleepy. I didn't wake up until daylight the next morning.

Soon after we had brought all the supplies and equipment out of the high country fire locations, several small storms moved in and instead of rain it brought snow. As hot as the weather got immediately after the big rain, there was about eight inches of snow at Heather Ponds at about 5,500 feet elevation. Doug decided that we should move the trail crew out of the high country because they might get snow-bound, and we couldn't get to their camp with the pack string. When I found out about the snow, I knew it would be cold and miserable breaking camp.

Doug and I headed up the trail early in the morning with four pack animals. The sun was coming up and the temperature was climbing. It was hard to imagine snow at Heather Ponds. There were a few clouds in the sky but no one would ever think that it meant anything. We planned to take down all the tents but one. We would spend the night in it, then pack up and head out the next day. We put two bales of hay on each pack animal so they would have plenty to eat. Dillon carried a little extra, enough oats for two feedings.

There was some snow at Frog Lake, two miles below the summit. The snow at the summit was about eight inches deep. Seven Lakes Basin below, looked like a winter wonderland. The snow hadn't melted out of the trees, the sun didn't seem to have much heat in it up here. We headed downgrade to Alta Lake Junction then turned up the old Devil's Peak Trail toward Heather Ponds. Here it was much cooler. In fact, the ice was thick enough to hold up a 1400 pound horse as we crossed a little stream. The wind blowing up from Seven Lakes Basin over the ice and snow had frozen things up tight. Once it snowed just a little in that country it stayed frozen until the following summer. My heavy bullhide chaps felt good. Some long-johns and an extra coat would have felt even better. The snow was heavy in the trees, causing the limbs to bend down like they were trying to cover their trunks for protection against the cold. The Mountain Hemlock and Shasta fir resembled giant popsicles standing on end.

When it first started snowing, it was rain part of the time and as soon as the raindrops touched something they formed ice. It put sort of a transparent glaze on all the trees and rock outcroppings. I don't know what the temperature was, but it was certainly a cold place compared to what it had been like the week before.

The two of us cleared out a place for the stock in a sheltered area and used some hay to scatter around for them to stand on. For now we,would leave their pack saddles on until they rested up. While Doug started a fire in the stove and another out in the open, I took an axe and broke the ice in several places in one of the ponds so the stock could drink. The ice was about four inches thick. We worked hard to get things packed before dark. We chipped ice and broke things loose. We had several things stacked around the fire to dry out or thaw out, and hardly took time to eat our lunches.

One comical looking thing the trail crew left us was the coffee pot. It was broad at the bottom and narrowed down at the top. The crew had forgotten to pour out the coffee. When it froze solid, the ice couldn't push upward' so it pushed down and out. The big coffee pot had a rounded bottom and the sides were bulged out all around. All the granite coating was broken off.

After much hard work, it looked like we were gaining on our camp-breaking job. From the looks of the sky, it could snow some more tonight; but we were just too tired to pack up and leave this evening. We gathered a big pile of wood to keep the fire going all night, and rigged up a cook stove in the doorway so most of the stove was inside the tent. By leaving the oven door and the fire box open, it put out a lot of heat. It was really quite comfortable in the little tent. Before dark we rechecked cinches on the pack saddles and put out most of the hay. The pack saddles would help keep the stock warmer. I even put a pack cover over Molly so it would help hold in a little more heat.

Doug and I ate a leisurely supper and talked about the things that had

happened during the summer. We fixed our sleeping bags so our feet were toward the stove. Doug found a book and was reading a story while I just lay there resting. We were warm and comfortable. It was hard to believe how cold it was outside. I was just about to doze off when there was a loud commotion in the direction of the stock. It sounded like something had spooked the animals and they were going crazy. We dashed out with flashlights to try and catch at least two horses. This was no time or place to be left afoot.

To our surprise the horses and mules were standing still looking uphill toward the noise that we could still hear. The sound faded away and everything was quiet. What a mystery. We couldn't imagine what it was. For the next hour we lay there trying to decide what might have caused the noise, and why the horses and mules were standing so still and quiet. Doug couldn't concentrate on finishing his story. Snoopy lay beside me, shivering from excitement as well as the cold. It seemed so good to be stretched out, relaxed and cozy, in our little tent. The life of a mule skinner might be tough - it's one of the most thankless jobs a man ever dreamed of, but I decided not to trade it for anything else.

When I worked in the logging woods, I ate three meals a day; and after hours of back-breaking work had a good bed to sleep in every night. As top loader for one outfit, we loaded a truck every six minutes until fifteen had been loaded. Then, while the trucks were gone on their morning run, we decked logs for the next round in the afternoon. We loaded the trucks twice and often three times a day. When I was second hooker on a McGifford Steam Jammer, we put out as many as forty six railroad cars of logs in an eight hour day. We accomplished this day after day, sometimes in runny hip-pocket-deep mud. For the three years I hauled logs, my day was rarely less than fourteen hours long. The most I hauled in any one day was 22,000 board feet, and the fastest I ever rolled a load down the highway was 70 miles an hour. Some of the memories of those hard, cruel days passed through my mind as I reminisced.

The job as Government Packer was a rougher job than any of my logging days. I very seldom ate three meals a day and never did I know when, where or if I would get to lie down and sleep. I spent ten to eighteen hours a day in the saddle and rode over fifty miles in one day many times. I packed everything on a mule that fit and lots of things that didn't. I've been bucked off, kicked, fallen on, bitten, to say nothing about the times I've been stepped on and dumped in the creek. But I still wouldn't trade it for any other job a man could mention.

Suddenly I was brought back to reality by a strange hissing noise. At first we couldn't imagine what it was, but soon found out. First I felt a lump slowly materializing under my back. Then several more at various points under my body. The hissing noise stopped and I was against the solid ground. A spark had popped out of the open stove and burned a hole through my air mattress. Doug stopped reading his book long enough to laugh for awhile. He got up and put more wood on the fire and pulled off his boots. Then he crawled back into his sleeping bag, which was held up by a soft air mattress. His bed was out of reach of the flying sparks.

Doug was asleep and snoring peacefully before I got adjusted around some of the biggest lumps that were poking up under my bed. Before I got settled, the wind had picked up and it was storming again outside. I was glad we had

covered the pack and saddle stock with saddles and canvas tarps. It should help to keep them warm.

Daylight came all too quickly and revealed about six inches of fresh snow, which had fallen during the night. The wind was really going to town. Wind speed was about twenty miles an hour where we were; but up on the ridge, it was coming across in gusts up to sixty miles an hour. Hopefully it would die down before we had to venture out to a point on the ridge and detonate a half case of dynamite and four electric caps. We couldn't pack it out with all the other gear for the same reason.

I fed and watered the stock while Doug started a fire and cooked our breakfast. About an hour later, we stood in front of our tent, dressed as warmly as possible and looked toward the summit. The wind was biting cold and still blowing hard. The sky was white above us from the snow blowing off the ridges above. It would be some task to perform our last little job.

With Doug in the lead, we lit out up a steep side slope to reach our new trail. We found the electric blasting caps and dynamite okay. The first quarter of a mile of trail was sheltered by a ridgetop to our right and also there was tall timber for most of the way. It was in the timber that we found out what had caused all the noise the night before. Around a bend in the trail out of hearing distance from our camp, about ten or fifteen head of elk had taken shelter for the night. Apparently as Doug and I came up the trail that morning, they scented us and moved out, maybe five minutes before we walked by. We didn't stop to count tracks very long because the wind was getting stronger.

With millions of tiny chunks of ice hitting us like sand from a sand blaster, we might never have found the blasting wire if someone had not hung one end of it over a tree limb near the trail. Now all we had to do was to get to the far end, about five hundred feet away, hook up the electric caps with the dynamite and touch it off.

Blasting is a dangerous job. Doug was good at it and knew exactly what not to do. Even though we were about to freeze to death, he didn't take any chances. The blasting equipment included five hundred feet of double wire, plastic coated for outdoor use. The blasting machine was a magneto with two terminals at the top and a detachable handle in the center. Doug kept the handle tied to his belt. There was another piece of equipment called a galvanometer. It was used to check for shorts and faulty hook-ups.

I went with Doug to the far end of the blasting wire where he chose a big boulder to set the charge under. He carefully buried one electric cap in part of the dynamite, then put the rest on top and pressed it down. He hooked up the two wires from the cap to the two bare ends of the main dynamite and said, "Well, kid, let's go and blast this rock off the mountain."

On the business end of the wire, Doug hooked up the galvanometer and watched it carefully as the needle showed that the set was good. Then he warmed up the blasting machine by twisting the handle several times. He connected the two wires as he hollered "FIRE" real loud. According to blaster safety rules,he would holler "FIRE" three times about one minute apart so anyone nearby could take cover until after the blast. In this case, we were sure that no one would be around. Besides the wind was so strong, it would drown out any effort to make anyone hear. One quick twist of the handle, and "boom"

it went. We did not go to look to see what happened to the rock. The crews would take care of the cleanup next year.

We rolled up the blasting line and headed back down the trail toward camp. We were so cold our joints ached and our hands and feet were numb. We built a big hot fire with the rest of our dry firewood to thaw us out. Packing up was a big problem but after about an hour, we climbed into our saddles and headed down the trail for home. The storm was getting worse now; but it wouldn't be long before the trail went into the timber, which would give us more protection from the force of the wind.

At Frog Lake, we rode out of the snowstorm and into rain, which was gusty and heavy. By the time we reached Lodgepole, we were sopping wet, hungry and beat. Doug and I had been cold and miserable for so long on the two day trip that it would take several days to really get back to normal. Seemed like it took more heat to warm me up when I felt a little bit cold. Even the horses and mules spent most of their time on the sunny side of the barn when the sun came out.

CHAPTER 20

TWO MULES LOADED WITH DYNAMITE

The next day started off as usual – up at 5:00 a.m., start a fire in the cookstove and put the coffee on, then whistle for the horses and mules. After a breakfast of oats for them, I went back to the house and ate a big breakfast myself. Lunch would be a can of soup and a thermos of hot coffee. The pack trip today was for the trail crew. Four mule-loads of food, dynamite and tools meant a long hard day. I was always a little jumpy, hauling dynamite on the mules.

One of the fire patrolmen brought up the food and tools to be packed, but he wasn't checked out to haul dynamite. My boss had sent me to school and there I learned how to be a blaster before they would let me haul the stuff or pack it on a mule. None of the certified blasters were around to haul the explosives to Lodgepole, so it was up to me to get the job done. Right after breakfast, I took the stock truck and headed for the powder magazine about twelve miles east of Butte Falls. When the truck crossed the cattleguard, I looked back toward the corral. Tom and Dillon stood side by side looking toward me with their big ears pointing straight up and turned forward as if they thought I had forgotten to take them along.

It took more than an hour to get to the powder magazine. First I had to go to the Butte Falls Ranger Station and get the key. At the magazine, a canvas tarp was put on the floor of the truck then I piled ten boxes of plastic dynamite on one end of it. Each box weighed 50 pounds. The tarp was pulled up over the boxes and anchored down. The powder magazine door was closed and locked. Then I went down a trail for about a hundred yards to the blasting cap house, and got 300 electric caps and put them in a separate container that was shock-proof. The cap box rode on the floor boards of the truck cab. I crossed my fingers and headed out. It was 10:00 o'clock when Tom and Dillon met me at the cattle-guard.

It was a tough job hauling the dynamite and everything else to the trailhead. There was so much to haul that Dillon had to hoof it clear to Black Bear Camp, five miles up the road. He followed along as my truck idled along at about eight miles an hour.

What a relief it would be when all the explosives were safely stored at trail camp. Smokey and the other horse carried 250 pounds of dynamite each. The electric caps were rolled up in my coat and tied fast behind my saddle. If only there was some way to get those horses to tip-toe up the trail and not make too much noise. Deer hunting season was on now and every once in awhile a hunter would fire a few shots. If one of those bullets hit a horse load of dynamite and it blew-up, there wouldn't be even a greasy spot left to tell the tale. But if that happened, I would at least be leading my pack string right on into glory.

The trip was uneventful, which was unusual. The trail crew met me as we rode up. Two of the men took care of Tom and Dillon while I rode for another mile up the trail to store the dynamite in a different place. The temporary dynamite storage site was a hundred yards uphill above the trail beside a huge boulder. To follow the safety rules set up by the Forest Service, there was a red flag at the location with a large sign in red eight-inch letters on a white background that said, DANGER – EXPLOSIVES. There were similar but smaller signs posted on trees a hundred feet from the powder magazine, in four directions. On the main trail five hundred feet from the point where we left to go toward the dynamite, was another sign that warned everyone entering the area. With all the warning signs, we hoped hikers and riders would be especially careful near the dynamite. We have been asked, "Why do you put up all those signs? Why not try to keep it a secret?" If we did not warn people, some wandering soul might put a .22 bullet into the heavy tarp covering the dynamite; and everything would be gone, the powder, the wandering sharp-shooter and half the mountain.

To illustrate my point, I once told a group of people this story: One day a local logger was blasting some stumps from a road he was building. At quitting time on a Friday, he had half a case of stumping powder left. Since he had more blasting to do the following Monday, he stored the powder in the shelter of the hood on an air compressor at the job.

Saturday was the opening day of hunting season. A hunter with rifle in hand strolled cautiously up the new road watching carefully for a big buck. About 400 feet from the air compressor he spotted a nice four-point buck in the timber beyond. He took careful aim and pulled the trigger of the high-powered gun. The bullet hit about two feet low. On Monday morning, the logger found pieces of his air compressor scattered all over the mountainside. The radiator grill was hanging in a tree a hundred yards from where the compressor had been; and in the road, lay an empty 30 06 rifle shell. About fifty feet beyond that lay a dandy four point buck in the edge of the road. The bullet didn't kill him - shrapnel from the explosion did. A piece of metal had almost severed his neck, and several cuts and blemishes indicated he had been hit elsewhere. I often wondered what the hunter thought.

With the dynamite stored in its designated place and the electric caps a safe distance away, I rode downhill to the trail crew's camp. Men were sitting around the campfire telling stories and touching up hand tools, such as axes, etc. Tom and Dillon were wandering around with drag ropes on their left front feet, and without pack saddles. Tom greeted me with a loud hee-haw, and Dillon trotted over to meet me. The men invited me to stay for supper and spend the night.

I always looked forward to spending a night with the trail crew. My sleeping bag was standard equipment and I took it along on nearly every pack trip. The food we had for supper that night was like a feast. The tossed green salad had fresh tomatoes, cucumbers and several other good things in it. There were plenty of hot biscuits and butter and honey, broiled steaks with mashed potatoes and brown gravy. For dessert, there was apple pie, banana cream pie and cake. The crew didn't have a regular cook. When they got to camp, each one who knew anything about cooking turned out something according to his

talents. We were eating a meal fit for a king, and it was happening nine miles remote from any road. For someone that was born and raised in a big city who might read my story, it will surely be hard for you to imagine such luxury in wilderness country.

In the morning, someone woke me with a loud yell. It sounded like the guy was hurt, but he had only burned his hand on the coffee pot handle. Breakfast was another big feed. It took a lot of food to last a man until noon in this high altitude. There were bacon and eggs and sourdough hot cakes smothered in butter and warm syrup. If you have never eaten sourdough hot cakes around a campfire, then you just haven't lived. The coffee tasted even better than it had the night before. I hated to leave, but a packer never gets much rest and there was a lot of riding to do yet today. Within an hour, I was headed for Alta Lake leading the two pack horses,and Tom and Dillon were poking along behind.

Lodgepole was a long ride away. This time the warm sun was on my back as we headed for home. Riding along down the trail my thoughts included Hank and his home on Bessie Rock. Today was the day he was expecting me to come back and answer his questions and take a bunch of things to him so he could get busy on repair work on the lookout. Surely Doug had told him that the trip would be a day late. We arrived at Lodgepole about 2:00 in the afternoon.

By getting home a little early, me and my mules got a good nights rest. The day had come for me to make another trip back to Bessie Rock and answer some of Hank Brown's questions. The horses and mules rode along in my truck like experts. They would lean into each turn in the road and seemed to know exactly where gears needed to be shifted and truck brakes applied.

Tom, Dillon and Smokey were the ones elected to carry the heavy loads. Hank watched me as each animal was unloaded and cinches loosened. The 96 foot climb up that ladder bothered me, but somehow I always made it. Hank was really happy to see me. He started talking the moment he saw me coming up the trail and never stopped until the tail mule disappeared around a switchback when we left Bessie Rock.

Hank was brought up to date on the latest happenings on the forest. He listened carefully as he was told about all the good food the trail crew had fed me. With that, I took a can of soup from my saddle bags and borrowed a kettle and a cup of water. My soup lunch would taste good while Hank talked on and on. He mentioned that he took a walk one evening and ended up at the base of the rock on the Red Blanket Creek side. He found where bears had dug in the dirt and scratched at the rock. After he finished his story, I told him that the one thing we forgot to mention the last time was that he should throw a little food over the side, so the bears would have something to eat. If he missed a couple of days, they would start climbing the rock to get the food for themselves. Hank almost decided right then to ride back with me as he envisioned a big black bear climbing the side of the rock after his food.

Hank recovered quickly from worrying about black bears and started asking questions. For the next two hours, he was the student and I the teacher. He caught on fast, but he still had to live through his first lightning storm.

The sun was getting low and there were three miles of trail to ride and 25

miles of rough road to drive over before supper. I shouldered my saddle bags and descended the ladder. A short time later, my mules were following close behind, happy to be headed down the sunset trail toward home.

Tom liked to lag behind and eat clumps of grass and the tender shoots of huckleberry brush. When the big mule didn't catch up with me, I would have to ride back sometimes as much as three miles and move him along. When this happened, he always greeted me with a loud hee-haw. That didn't help my disposition a bit.

Today Tom found a good spot to eat about two miles down the trail, and I knew he wouldn't come along by himself. For easy maintenance, the telephone line crossed over the trail all along the way. I broke off a long tree limb and started tapping the line. Tom started moving out. It was a minute or two before he came into sight. His long ears were sticking straight up, his head held high; and he was running like the wind. You could hear him snort for half a mile. He couldn't figure out where that awful ticking noise was coming from. He travelled at full speed until he got to me, then slid to a stop, turned and looked back from where he had come and gave one last loud snort. Tom never let me out of his sight from there to Lodgepole. My arrival was always the same. The stock left behind came running, kicking and playing. My family was watching from the yard when the truck rattled across the cattleguard.

The next day was Saturday. The weather forecast was lightning. The storm would probably hit about 1:00 o'clock. That meant standby in case there was a fire to fight. My workday on paper was 8 hours, from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 and from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.five days a week. That was a forty hour week. My real workday was seldom less than 16 hours a day. More often than not 7 days a week and many hours on standby for no pay at all, and many more of the same in the saddle doing a job no one else wanted to do. Doug and all the fire guards and lookouts were relaxing. That is one reason I became very independent. No one told me what to do, except my immediate supervisor; and many times his orders were revised to suit my ways. I always did what was expected of me, then went ahead and did other things which benefited the Forest Service in connection with Doug's wishes. He never did lay out enough work to keep me busy more than eight hours a day.

The lightning storm struck at 1:30 p.m. It was awfully noisy, with lots of rain and it hailed hard for about twenty minutes. The hail stones were the size of an average marble and clattered down from the roof tops of the buildings with a deafening roar. Depressions in the yard were filled with hail. Windrows of the white, round ice lay under the eves of Lodgepole house. It looked like we might be able to collect enough to make a batch of ice cream. The entire storm lasted less than an hour, then dissipated and the sun came out.

Don ran to the horse trough near the barn to get the wooden bucket which was the outside of the ice-cream freezer. We kept it there so the wooden staves wouldn't dry out and let the bucket fall apart. The three girls with Tricia leading, got a small tub and a dish pan and started collecting hailstones. My wife was stirring up a mixture, while I rounded up some rock salt. In less than half an hour from the time we first got the ice-cream-making idea, we had a half gallon of the best handcranked ice-cream anyone could ask for.

There are lots of other memories connected with our summer home in the

mountains. That was the year we decided to get a couple of good milk goats, so we could have fresh milk everyday. The goats could live well on the brush and weeds and wouldn't bother a thing.

One day the trail crew stopped by to visit on their way home. They had a big yellow dog that loved to chase anything that moved. The first thing he saw was one of the big, white nanny goats as she scooted around behind the house. Away he went in hot pursuit. Around the house they went, the goat was scared to death and squirting milk in every direction as she ran. The second time around, she ran between two lodgepole pine trees where the kids had a swing. The rope pulled tight, low on her chest, and she sailed upward like she had wings. Her hind feet were four or five feet above the ground before she came down and landed on top of the dog. He took off like a streak and hid under the car, while the goat headed for the brush. Later that evening, when I finally coaxed her to me with a bucket of oats and milked her, she had about one cup of milk left. She was still wide-eyed with fear of the big yellow monster that had chased her around the house.

One evening that summer at about 4:00 o'clock, the horses and mules took off running and making a lot of noise. They were running toward the cattleguard and gate out by the main road. We dashed out to see what was happening. There stood Smokey with her head hanging over the gate waiting to be turned in. I went up to open the gate for her. She took up the whole opening as she staggered through. She was tired and worn out and weak.

The trail crew had borrowed her to pack a weeks rations and some tools into the high country. Monday night they set up camp near the Skyline Trail at a spot called Lucky Camp. The two men weren't experienced horsemen and did not know how to stake her out to keep her there, even though I had showed them, first-hand, how to tie the kind of knot that would hold. From Lucky Camp to Lodgepole is around 35 miles one way. The way she looked, the old gray mare must have walked all night and most all day to get home. I caught her and took her to the barn for a bucket of oats and enough hay to hold her until morning. She would have to be returned to the trail crew the next day to pack their equipment up the trail.

At 6:00 o'clock the next morning, with Smokey and a good saddle horse on my truck, I headed toward the Bessie Creek Shelter, twenty-five miles by road from Lodgepole and an hours drive. From there, we went by a series of switchbacks up a steep rise to level ground. The Lucky Camp Trail follows a ridge that is the divide between Red Blanket and Bessie Creeks, running east and west. It's an easy trail to ride, mostly level with some small pitches now and then. At the east end, the trail climbs up from a draw for about an eighth of a mile and meets the Skyline Trail. There are lots of springs and swampy areas along the last mile. It was near one of these grassy spots that the crew had made their camp.

The two men, Al and Tom, greeted Smokey like a long lost friend and were glad they wouldn't have to backpack all the gear they had to their next camp. After lunch, we took off in different directions when we got to the Skyline Trail. I rode north to Stewart Falls, which is on the headwaters of Red Blanket Creek. Stewart Falls is to the right of the Skyline Trail going north, and is right at the south edge of Crater Lake National Park. Red Blanket Creek tumbles down

over solid rock for fifty or sixty feet. The falls is shaped like a Chinese fan, wide at the bottom and narrow at the top. There is a long deep pool at its base and a small campground between the trail and the falls, which includes a shelter, garbage pit and toilet. Chipmunks were everywhere. I couldn't resist feeding them my sandwich left over from lunch.

From here, I rode south on the Skyline Trail for several miles, and finally caught up with the trail crew and Smokey. She was as content as she could be, eating huckleberry brush and tender green sedge. Soon we came to the edge of the Oregon Desert. It is an area of about 400 acres between Stewart Falls and Ranger Springs and is covered with old lodgepole pine and hardly any other vegetation underneath. There are a lot of rock ledges and humps scattered around where deer and elk love to stay. There are a few clumps of young lodgepole pine scattered here and there.

About halfway across the desert there is an opening, shaded by tall pine trees. Every year there is a huge snowdrift left over from winter storms, which never completely melts away until about the last of July. That day the drift was at least seventy feet from one side to the other and over six feet deep in the center. It was as round as if someone had constructed the huge mound of frozen snow. It looked like a big mush bowl turned upside down. My horse walked right up on top of it, and sank into it only about an inch deep. She bit off mouthfuls of the white ice because she was thirsty.

Soon we came to the McKie Trail Junction, and headed down a mountainside to a beautiful place nestled in the timber - McKie Meadow. There was a small creek running across the meadow, the headwaters of Halifax Creek. In 1953, I rode across the small live creek for the first time. The water was swift in places. Upstream from the crossing was a rather quiet deep pool, which supported ten and twelve inch fish. The Tom and Jerry Trail goes north from McKie Camp. The first two miles is a series of switchbacks to the top of the ridge. From there, I could look at two big rocky mountains called Tom and Jerry. It was about four miles from here to my truck at Bessie Creek Shelter. Doug Finch was with me on my first trip through this country in the summer of 1953. That was when the man on Bessie Rock sure enough had appendicitis.

This day was one in a hundred. Generally there were from one to five head of pack stock behind me. Today I rode alone, and what a wonderful free ride it was. Not a worry or a care in the whole world. No time schedule to meet and no one to answer to. It gave me lots of time to think and plan for the future, although as I write these words, I can look back and see how nearsighted I was. My thoughts seldom went beyond the realm of a mule skinner. My Government mules meant an awful lot to me.

CHAPTER 21

MY NEW MARE, MOLLY

Gordon Jesse Walker – my lead horse Molly

On the following weekend, I took my family and drove down to the Rogue River Valley to take a look at a saddle mare. She was supposed to be half Arabian, white,with black shadows around her eyes and nose. Everyone was excited about the prospect of getting a horse of our own. Molly was sure enough a beautiful mare.

The owners told me that she had bucked the last three people off. They also said who the men were; and not a one knew anything about horses, let alone how to ride one. Molly was easy to catch, but got lively when my heavy saddle landed on her back. My way of riding was to never get on a strange horse without my heavy chaps and spurs buckled on. The chaps might save a little bit of my hide if she dumped me off, and the spurs would keep her moving if she needed coaxing along.

While getting ready for what might be a good ride, the white mare looked good to me. Her feet were small and would take about a number two shoe. She would weigh around 1300 or 1350 pounds and was well proportioned. We liked her very much. She was quite alert as I turned her around after the saddle was cinched up tight. Then I swung up and got all set for anything. She had a chance to do her worst, but so far so good. She had a good gait and was easy to control. After we covered about ten miles over rough terrain, my mind was made up. She would become the best horse that ever stayed at Lodgepole. We

made a deal and the mare was ours. Her name was Molly.

Molly loved to ride in the truck. She caught on fast as she rode from Butte Falls to Lodgepole. Tom and Dillon rejected her immediately. The old boys would chase her to a corner, then try to run her through the fence. Several times they ganged up on Molly and tried to hurt her, one way or another. We kept Molly away from the mules as much as we could, but even then they would bite and kick her if she came near the fence. If this kept up, we might have to sell her. Meanwhile, I rode one of the other horses when a pack trip was made.

Another trip to Bessie Rock was coming up and I decided to ride Molly and put packs on Tom and Dillon. Molly rode up in the front end of the truck and tied the two mules off in the back with a rope across so they couldn't reach Molly. The twenty-five mile trip was uneventful.

All the while I was putting packs on Tom and Dillon, the two never took their eyes off Molly. With the mules tied together, I picked up a lead rope and swung into the saddle.

Dillon reached out and started to bite Molly in the rear. She squealed and kicked with both hind feet, narrowly missing his nose. This was the first time Molly had ever fought back. Dillon couldn't figure that one out, so he tried to nip her again about a mile up the trail. This time he was too close. She clipped him alongside the head and peeled some hide off his right jaw. The mule stood back and really flopped his big ears around.

Nothing more happened until we were headed back toward the truck and Tom tried his luck. He decided to run past Molly and kick her on the way by. What he got for his trouble was two flying hind feet, which hit him broad-side. She bit him on the rump when he went fleeing for safety. Molly had some black mule hairs between her teeth. She was a little difficult to stay on when she went to battle, but it was fun. She seemed to gain a lot of self-confidence with me on her back around those mules. I decided to see if she would continue to fight her way.

At Lodgepole that evening, I purposely fed the three together. Tom decided to chase Molly away from her oats, so he made a run at her. She squealed and kicked fast and hard and peeled a large patch of hide and hair off his shoulder. The spot was shaped just like Molly's right hind foot. Her left foot clipped the end of his nose. Dillon decided to try his luck about two minutes later, only to meet near disaster. Molly stood on her front feet and slammed Dillon squarely in the ribs with both hind feet. He almost went down. For the next half hour, Dillon seemed to be bent some and walked around in a daze. Later I checked him for busted ribs.

From that day on, Molly was the leader. The other nine horses and mules followed her. When she laid back her ears and bared her teeth, they knew she meant business. Doug was glad Molly turned out like she did, and, Boy Howdy, was there ever a good feeling in my heart that she became the dominant one.

One day Doug drove up to Lodgepole to give me a test on smoke-chasing. Out of all the smoke-chasing instructors I ever had, Doug, without a doubt, was the best one. He loved his work, and fire suppression was his life. When he told me something, I knew he had done the same thing many times.

After our session, my boy Don asked Doug's permission to cut some limbs off a big lodgepole pine that grew in the edge of the pasture by the driveway.

Doug told him, "Sure, go ahead," thinking Don wouldn't be able to cut off many of the limbs. After Doug went back home, Don got a saw and while the girls watched, wide-eyed, to cheer him on, he proceeded to cut limbs. Soon Don came to the house and wanted me to come and see what he had done.

The only limbs left on the tree were the last three swirls in the very top of the sixty-foot tree. Each limb was cut off about ten inches from the trunk, leaving a series of stubs sticking out. Don said these were stairsteps so he could climb back down. Doug came up the following day on official business and could hardly believe his eyes when he saw the tree. His only comment was, "Well, I guess you had better cut it down."

We were sitting in the kitchen drinking coffee and talking when we heard Don and Tricia hollering, "Timber!" loud and long. Janna and Leslie were standing way back and watching. Soon we heard a loud thump, then the kids all came running in. Don wanted Doug to come and see if he had done a good job. Where the tree had been standing, there was a stump about four feet high and the log was laying out across the pasture. Doug had to laugh, but then he asked me if I would cut the stump off and maybe saw the log up for wood.

One of the reasons Doug had come up today was to look at our pack saddles so that he and I could make up our minds about replacing the old sawbucks with some new Decker pack saddles. I mentioned to him that the Imnaha Guard, Neil Wyatt, had come over and borrowed his riding saddle the day before and that he had readjusted the stirrups. I had done my best to keep him from taking Doug's rig, but he had a key to the tack room lock.

There is one thing that goes against the grain more than anything else for a cowboy or packer, and that is for someone to take his saddle and fool around with the stirrup adjustment. Once they are moved up or down, they never seem to fit quite right again, even though the stirrup leathers are put back exactly like they were before. A cowboy will loan almost anything he owns, except his saddle.

Doug brought his saddle outside and carefully put it on the hitching rail. He looked it over as if he were looking for finger prints. The stirrups didn't match for length. He wondered if maybe one of Neil's legs was longer than the other. After readjusting the leathers, Doug stood back to see if they looked right. He then climbed up in the saddle, being careful not to fall off, since the stirrups were a foot or so above the ground.

As he was checking the length, he leaned slightly to the right, just far enough to see his boot. Then he leaned to the left to see the other side. Apparently satisfied, he was a little under-cautious and leaned too far. The saddle moved. Doug instinctively grabbed for the saddle horn and the cantle, but they were going in the same direction he was. A movie camera would have been priceless at that moment. Doug landed on his back with the saddle on top of him. His feet were still in the same position and he had a death grip on the saddle horn and cantle. The startled look on his face is one I'll never forget.

As Doug was beginning to lean first one way, then the other, my wife had stepped out on the porch to ask if we would like some hot coffee. The fact that she got to see the whole performance added to Doug's embarrassment. Something like that happening to the boss usually gets around somehow. It was just too good to keep quiet. It was a lucky thing for me, and several others,

that Doug was a good natured man. In fact, he enjoyed the attention he got when someone mentioned something about the guy who fell off the hitching rail at Lodgepole.

Doug had lunch with us and left in the early afternoon. He asked me to go to Imnaha and bring four head of stock back to Lodgepole for a trip the next day. Imnaha Guard Station is eight miles from Lodgepole by road and five miles by trail. The Guard there got the same pay as I did, but worked only half as hard since I did all the packing. It took a lot of long, hard hours to make even the shortest trip. My wife and kids took me to Imnaha in the car and I would take a short-cut by trail to get home about the same time they did.

At Imnaha I put my saddle on Sundee, the wild-eyed bay mare, turned Tom and Dillon loose with the other horses and headed for Lodgepole. My mules spooked very easily. I never spooked one on purpose, like jumping toward one or tossing something their way. That is one reason they trusted me. Sometimes I would play tricks on them while riding and I supposed they figured any tom-foolery along that line was caused by my horse anyway.

The mules headed down the trail at a full gallop with Sundee and me in close pursuit. Everybody slowed down after the first mile. Tom would stop now and then to grab a bit of green grass along the trail. Imnaha and Wallowa Creek came together and formed a wide body of water with a deep pool at the lower end. The upper part was more shallow and made an ideal spot to ford the deep stream. The trail made a sharp bend around a clump of hemlock and went down to the creek crossing. I saw Tom through the trees. He had stopped by the waters edge to eat some more green grass.

I touched Sundee with a spur, leaned forward and we were at full gallop in an instant. The burst of speed and clatter of hooves caused Tom to almost have a heart attack as Sundee came down the trail around the sharp turn toward him. With one frightened glance, Tom reared up on his hind legs and jumped as far as he could. The mule went almost out of sight for a moment in the deep pool. The water splashed high. He never slowed down until he was completely out of sight heading along the trail toward the Rogue River. He jumped two more creeks before he finally found another patch of grass near the river. When I rode up, Tom was completely engrossed in eating. The roar of the swift water kept him from hearing me until we were near him.

Again I spurred up and headed toward Tom full blast. Sundee seemed to get a kick out of what we were doing, too. The bay mare had scared Tom once and here she was about to run him down again. Tom reared and jumped. He didn't pay any attention to where he was going. He jumped into the boiling waters. It looked like a water spout before he got his footing. From here on home, nothing could catch Tom. He stopped on the other side long enough to shake the cold water off, then up the switchback trail he went. I believe the mules ran all the rest of the way home. We were only two miles from Lodgepole.

The horses and mules got another days rest following the trip Doug mentioned. It was my job to make a trip to Butte Falls to pick up another load of dynamite to pack into the trail crew in Seven Lakes Basin. They needed about 200 caps. The dynamite was stored at Lodgepole. The caps and dynamite had to be kept at least 100 yards apart so there wouldn't be any

chance of detonation. With Doug's help, we had rigged up a place to keep explosives safely overnight.

The day.I took the dynamite to the trail crew, I left Lodgepole at 7:00 a.m. riding Molly,and Tom and Dillon each carrying 200 pounds. The caps were tied behind my saddle and I just hoped a mule wouldn't stumble and fall. The long ride up the mountain was uneventful. I met the trail crew along the way and continued to where we kept the explosives. Today was one of those boring days. There wasn't a thing to break the monotony, not even a good story from the crew at lunch. As I look back now, I'm glad there wasn't anything unusual. Packing the dynamite on mules was excitement enough.

The new trail being constructed by the crew started west of the Seven Lakes Basin, topped out on the ridge and dropped downhill to the Alta Lake Junction. It followed along the ridge and stayed on the east side of Venus, about 200 yards west of Heather Ponds. It was built on a 3% to a 7% grade, with now and then a short pitch of 12%. The trail went up the east face of Jupiter and Lucifer, then came out on the saddle between Devil's Peak and Shale Butte. The new construction would eventually be a part of the Skyline Trail. Tom and Dillon packed more than two tons of plastic dynamite that summer to blast rock on the new trail, and I had to work on it a few days myself.

Locating the trail as they did, shortened it by perhaps half a mile, but also shortened the time it was usable each year by about three months. The trail could have started west of Frog Lake, continued south and southeast. Along the side of Venus it could have reached the saddle between Venus and Jupiter by a switchback or two, for a really good view of the Seven Lakes Basin and the country to the north and east. Then it could have swung on around the west slope of Jupiter and through the saddle between Jupiter and Lucifer, and held to the south side of the ridge between there and Devil's Peak. With this route, the only snowdrifts to buck in the spring would have been the big one just below the lookout and maybe one where the trail left the saddle between Jupiter and Lucifer.

When things were unusually quiet as we went down the trail, I did a lot of thinking. Many times I considered trying to start a dude wrangling outfit, so I could have the pleasure of escorting people to the country we loved so much and teach them how to enjoy real outdoor living and to have a deep respect for the wilderness. But it takes a lot of money to get started on a venture like that, and so my good ideas turned out to be just dreams to help me pass away the time in the saddle. When I got home that evening, I was grouchy and irritable, as always after a ride that lacked excitement. My family thought my boss had got after me or something on that particular day.

CHAPTER 22

LIGHTNING FIRE ON JUPITER MOUNTAIN

The following weekend was quiet and restful at Lodgepole. The horses and mules and I took full advantage of it. Then on Sunday afternoon I made a trip to Butte Falls for a load of supplies for Bessie Rock, I sorted and packed everything in pack boxes after returning to Lodgepole so as to head out early the next morning.

Monday morning it was cold enough to freeze ice on the horse trough. I started a fire in the wood cook stove and put the coffee pot on and then whistled for the horses and mules. They never failed to come on a dead run. It's hard to catch a black mule when it's dark, but I managed to many times. They all knew there would be no oats for breakfast unless there was a halter on them. While I shaved and packed my saddle bags with food and mail, my wife fixed breakfast.

It didn't take long to saddle up, load the stock and head down the road toward Bessie Rock. Our District Ranger, Britt Ash, owned a big strawberry roan mare. She was a little wild-eyed and ornery at times. Britt wanted me to use her now and then, so I decided to take her today. Molly hated the strawberry roan and proved it by reaching over and biting her on the rump. Brownie let fly with both hind feet and kicked a board out of the side of the truck. For a moment it felt like a hind tire had blown out. The mules were always trying to bite Brownie, but the old gal got even somehow.

The ride from the end of the trail to Bessie Rock was a little over three miles. The last mile was built on the Red Blanket Creek side of the mountain. Yellow jackets seemed to like it along that part of the trail for some reason. The first bee's nest got stirred up at the base of an old tree root. Usually the mules on the tail-end of the pack string got stung, but this time Molly got stung several times. I threw the lead rope down and the two mules and Brownie went up above the trail and didn't get stung at all. Molly had tender skin and the yellow jackets stung hard. There were several hanging from her shoulders and neck. She very nearly bucked me off trying to knock them loose. At last I got her stopped and jumped off. She stood still as they were brushed from her and I rubbed her burning hide. In a little while, I climbed on and headed for the Rock.

Things looked pretty good on Bessie Rock. Our man had mastered everything, except washing dirty dishes and cutting his whiskers. In passing, I informed him that these were daily duties to be taken care of in the early morning, and that it was part of his job to clean house and shave.

While we were eating lunch, I asked him if he had noticed anything unusual toward Devil's Peak. He said that the only thing was a loud bang now and then, but that he could see nothing. I took his field glasses and started watching out toward Seven Lakes Basin and saw a huge puff of gray dust fly up, then a loud boom. You could even see the dust without the glasses.

It was very important for the Bessie Rock Lookout to watch that country because a fire could take off after the men left the job, even though every precaution was being taken to prevent fire.

We headed down the mountain toward the truck; and while riding along, I sorted out several things in my mind - things I had noticed at the lookout. There were a lot of magazines, new ones, that were not packed in on a mule. There was a hammock rigged up outside the lookout house. Also, there was an empty bottle that had OLD CROW printed on the label. From what I could figure out, he wasn't looking for fire very much of the time. Sooner or later he would get found out.

The rest of the week was rough. There were several trips in a row, with the last two the longest. Molly carried me over 85 miles in two days, while Tom and Dillon followed along behind carrying about 150 pounds each. After that, the trail crew needed a replenishment of dynamite, electric caps and food. It meant another early Monday morning trip.

This time someone else would haul the food and supplies to Lodgepole on Sunday afternoon so I could get more rest. It took all day Saturday to patch rigging and get ready for the following week. In the afternoon, I met the fire patrolman at the yard gate. My wife invited him in for coffee and cake. We spun a few yarns and caught up on some of the latest gossip, and I quizzed him about what he had brought up for tomorrow's trip. He mentioned several articles; but when I asked if he had brought the dynamite, he said no, that Doug wouldn't let him haul it. He wasn't qualified to handle explosives. He might just as well have stayed home if he couldn't haul the dynamite.

Monday morning I got the horses and mules ready and then drove down to the powder magazine and picked up a two-mule load of dynamite. This caused me to get a very late start. Each mule was packing 200 pounds of dynamite and Smokey had almost 200 pounds of food. The sun was above me when we started up the trail; but as we headed in an easterly direction, the sun's rays felt good on my back because the high altitude air was cold.

By the time the dynamite was stored and covered, it was getting very late. I rode into camp and there were several men milling around, but they weren't talking much. Usually we were greeted by everyone and all activity stopped when I rode in. But not this time. They were an awfully dirty-looking bunch of guys, which was unusual for this time of day. I got down and tied the stock to a hitching rail and walked over to the tents.

Doug was just drying his face on a big towel. He looked at me from behind the towel and asked me where in the world I had been. His face looked all puffy like he had been stung by yellow jackets. The fire crewmen looked puffy-eyed too. Before anyone told me, I realized what was wrong.

At around 4:00 o'clock the afternoon before, Doug set off a series of blasts along a rimrock. There were several large hemlock trees nearby with lots of dry moss and dead limbs on the lower part of every tree. The crew kept watch for about an hour and then left and went to camp about a mile down the mountain. The wind always blew slightly on the east slopes of Jupiter. There was one hot spark that no one had detected. A hot chunk of debris landed on a dry punky stump up the hill. In the evenings the air moves down the mountain into the canyons. The spark fanned into a smouldering pocket of hot coals.

Soon there was a flame and more hot sparks. The dry needles and twigs ignited, and the fire spread toward taller trees and caught onto the dry moss and dead limbs. At this point, they had a potential forest fire well on its way.

Bessie Rock was supposed to be watching toward Devil's Peak, especially after the men quit work; but I suppose he was too busy reading or sleeping. The fire spread to some dry logs and really went to town. It covered about an acre but stayed confined to the bench where it had started. Doug had noticed the smell of smoke during the night but had supposed it was from their camp fire.

At daybreak, one of the men got up and went outside. He saw that the whole canyon was filled with dense smoke and hollered at Doug. They dashed up the trail to see what was going on. The fire was on its way again just about the time they got there. While Doug started building fireline, the foreman dashed back to camp for more manpower and tools. It was nip and tuck before the six men were able to corral the forest fire at about 10:00 a.m. No one had eaten breakfast. Three of the men went to camp to eat and then returned to the fire so the other three could get something to eat. No one left after that until the fire was dead out. That was why everyone was so quiet and dirty when I rode into camp.

Doug tried to call for help on his Forest Service radio, but it wouldn't respond. The Bessie Rock Lookout never did see any smoke from the Devil's Peak area. We knew for sure that Doug would be riding over that way in a few days and that he would find out why.

That evening, I pitched in and helped get supper started. The men were so tired one of them didn't stir once he laid down on his bed. After supper, I saddled Molly and rode up to where the fire was and looked it over good while the crew got some rest. The fire was about a hundred yards wide and went uphill for several hundred feet. It was wider at the top because there were several spot fires which had to be treated the same as the main fire. The crew had built a good wide, deep fireline. Every limb and tree root was cut and tossed away from the fire. Where logs were in the way, a six foot chunk was cut out. Fire can crawl across a fireline anyplace where anything burnable bridges the cleared-off line. I saw where the mop-up process started. The men started at the fireline and worked their way toward the center. All the charred bark and wood was chopped away from stumps and logs. Whole stumps and tree roots were grubbed out to get every single spark. Hot rocks were pulled to the surface to cool off.

I got down and tied Molly to a small tree and took a closer look, even got down on my hands and knees, cold trailing the line, and dug out five hot spots which were all tree stumps or roots still smouldering away. It gets dark fast once the sun goes down, and cool air begins settling in. That caused the humidity to rise and cut down the chance of the fire spreading. I left the fire and rode back to camp and don't believe the tired fire-fighters ever knew when Molly walked in.

Morning came along much too soon. My sleep was shattered by a long wail from Doug, who loved nothing better than to wake a sleepy mule skinner. After a big breakfast, I saddled Molly and the pack animals, bid the men goodbye and headed for Lodgepole with the whole day ahead of me. A couple of side trips

off the main trail seemed like a good idea. It helped me to learn more about this wonderful country I helped take care of.

Down the trail about four miles I took another look at a tree stump and a charred log laying on the ground by it. The snag had been felled by a smoke-chaser in 1951 or 1952. The cut was slanted, which indicated that it had been felled with a crosscut saw. One day in August, so the story goes, the Cascade Mountains got a terrific pounding with lightning, a storm that lasted for half a day. Manley and Hi Bryant on Rustler Peak Lookout spotted a fire just below the 4 mile sign on the Seven Lakes Trail. There wasn't much rain with the storm, which meant the fire could get out of hand fast. The Bryants called headquarters at Butte Falls Ranger Station and turned in the fire. They located it by township, range, section and sub-division. They also named the known points near the fire so the smoke-chaser, who was Hal Von Stein, could find it easily once he got in the country where it was.

At that time, John Henshaw was the District Assistant in charge of fire control. He called Hal at Lodgepole and gave him all the information he would need to find the fire. John told Hal to take a saddle horse and a mule to carry fire fighting equipment. Hal rode right to the fire. It was about 300 yards from the sign and about 100 feet below the trail. Hal tied the horse and mule to a tree and called in on his radio. He told John what he had found. Hal figured he could fall the burning snag alone in about an hour. He would have the fire well trailed and mopped up by dark. This sounded good to John, although he would stay near the office radio in case Hal ran into trouble. Manley and Hi would be listening on the Rustler Peak radio, too.

Hal started to work on the snag. It was burning mostly on one side and toward the top. Hot coals kept him from working on that side. The only way to put the fire out was to cut the forty foot snag. Hal started his cut about three feet above the ground. He was cutting at an angle. The stump would be three feet on one side and two feet on the other when the snag came down. Standing near the burning snag was a small tree with a few limbs sticking out on either side of the snag. Hal didn't think the small limbs would cause him any trouble, but they did.

He sawed for about an hour. The snag started to fall, and he jumped back so he would be in the clear. It moved a couple of inches and stopped. He thought maybe there was still too much wood holding, so he went back and started to saw some more. Without warning the snag slipped off the stump and started to fall backwards. Hal was caught completely off-guard. He ran from the falling snag and tripped over a rock and fell flat. The burning snag fell across his lower legs and pinned him to the ground. Luckily, the top of the snag next to him wasn't on fire. The moment the snag hit the ground, it began to burn more rapidly and catch fire to the limbs and debris it fell into.

Hal worked furiously to free himself, but he couldn't budge. He pulled one foot out of his boot and tried to pull his other foot free the same way, but he couldn't. He managed to reach a long stick nearby and began prying rocks loose and digging the dirt from around his pinned foot. The fire was getting closer as it burned uphill along the dry snag, and fire was spreading through the debris on the ground.

If he couldn't free his foot within the next few minutes, it would be too late.

I read somewhere that when a person is really frightened, he can do things that would not be possible under ordinary conditions. Somehow Hal moved a rock just far enough to pull his other foot free. His clothes were beginning to smell from the intense heat. He crawled to safety and watched as flames enveloped the snag. His fouled shoe was burning vigorously. His left foot was badly injured, but he managed to crawl to the trail where his horse and mule were tied. He had put his radio beside a big tree where it would be safe. He called John and told him what had happened. While he talked, the fire got hotter and was burning toward the trail. What had been a fire less than six feet across was now an inferno of over a quarter of an acre.

Hal had a tough time getting the pack arranged on Dillon so he could get lined out. He left most of his fire-fighting tools and a couple of things he couldn't get tied down. With great effort and pain, he pulled himself up into the saddle and braced himself for the long ride home. His shoeless foot was swollen and black and blue. The other foot was badly bruised and caused him much discomfort. He also noticed burned spots on his clothes where the hot sparks had smoldered away until they went out.

John sent out two or three men to finish the job of putting out the fire, while Hal rode back to Lodgepole feeling like he had really pulled a stunt. In fact, he was unable to chase smoke for the rest of the season. Some time later, he discovered why the snag fell over backwards onto him. Standing close to the burning snag was a small green hemlock. The branches were nearly all burned short. There was a small limb which prevented the snag from toppling over. Hemlock limbs are tough and hard to break. Because of the smoke, Hal hadn't noticed them. They were strong enough to hold the snag and keep it from tipping forward. Of course,the snag soon slipped off the stump and over backwards it came.

This true story is proof that being a smoke-chaser is dangerous living at times; but as stated before, we all hired out to be tough and tough we were.

CHAPTER 23

SMOKE ON SPRING CREEK

A thunder storm was building above the mountains surrounding Lodgepole. I saw thunderheads reaching into the sky for twenty thousand feet; their rounded columns of pure white stood out against a vivid blue sky. When thunder clouds came into view from Lodgepole, they were close enough for us to hear the thunder, the noise you hear when a tremendous force of electricity strikes the ground. This one would surely start a forest fire somewhere.

At 3:00 in the afternoon, Blue Rock Lookout reported the first strike on the side of Mount McLaughlin. At 4:00 p.m., Rustler Peak spotted a fire burning and a column of smoke leaning toward the east. They plotted the fire on Spring Creek just south of the Imnaha Guard Station. This was my fire. I collected all the information I could by phone. The facts were not complete because another storm had moved in and shut off visibility in the area. I whistled for my horses and mules. They came running to me. Molly was sure she was going to get a second helping of oats, which she did after she and the mules were caught.

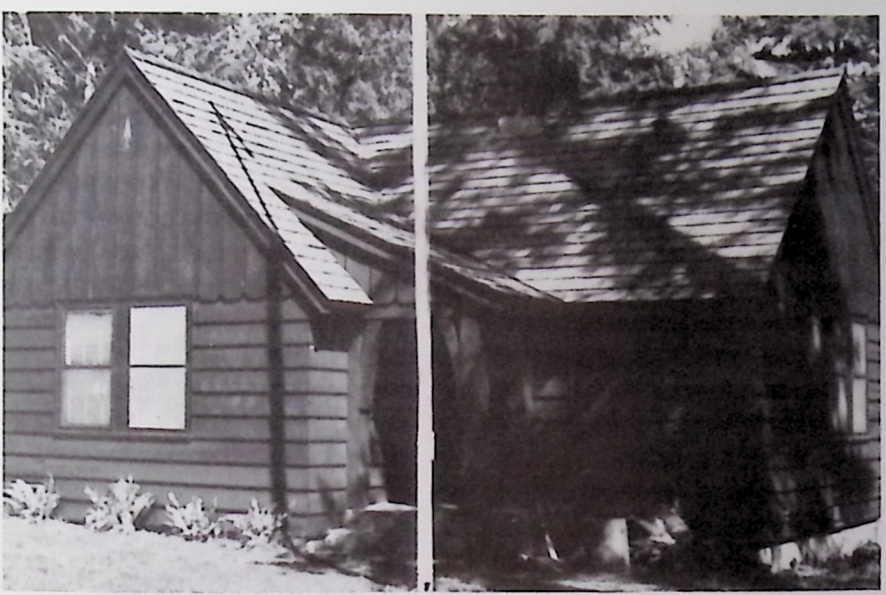
When the stock was saddled and tied to the feed rack, I went back to the house to find out what was going on. Doug asked me to drive my car toward Imnaha and see if there might be a strike on Spring Creek. It took me about twenty minutes to get there. I looked up and down the creek but couldn't see any sign of a fire, so I returned to Lodgepole. Rustler Peak could still see a goodly column of smoke coming up and it made me uneasy because I couldn't take off and find the fire. At 10:30 p.m., Doug called and asked me to go up and have another look around. In the evening, the smoke always blows downhill or down stream. Maybe the smoke would be showing up by now.

It's spooky at night, walking through tall timber and so dark and mysterious. A forest is noisy, not because of the animals but because trees are growing or something. Dry snags fall and dead limbs drop off. When a dead snag dries out or cools off, it sometimes pops and snaps. Of course there are a lot of wild animals who scamper away, making all kinds of weird sounds. An elk running through the timber sounds like a runaway box car and a porcupine makes a shuffling sound as his quills rub against the small plants on the ground. A cub bear running up a pine tree makes your hair stand on end. I sniffed the air for smoke and walked for two hours, but could find nothing. Doug was about to go crazy wondering where the fire was. At last we had to give it up and went home with instructions to light out again at daybreak. We had to find that fire.

In the first light of morning, I was ready to go, having eaten a hearty breakfast and packed a big double lunch. Rustler Peak could still see the column of smoke. Doug instructed me to go to Imnaha and call in from there. By then he hoped to have further instructions for me. I arrived at Imnaha, went in and

twisted the handle of the telephone the right amount of turns and Doug answered.

He wanted me to head up the Alta Lake Trail to the one mile sign, then take a compass shot 30° to the northeast. This course would take me to the top of a small knoll covered with Douglas fir trees. As I walked up the steep trail, I thought of Molly and my mules back at Lodgepole. Boy, if only they were with me now. At the one mile sign, I took a 30° shot uphill and laid out a course, and fought brush thickets and tangled blackberry vines. Up over rocks and around small ledges, over rotten logs and through heavy stands of young trees I scrambled. It took an hour to get to the hilltop, but my view was good. I climbed a tree to gain a little more elevation. There was no smoke in sight! Doug sounded desperate when he got the news over my Forest radio. With a big sigh, he said, "Return to Imnaha and stay by the telephone and wait for further instructions."



Imnaha House

Back at Imnaha I enjoyed a short rest and ate some of my lunch. At 1:00 p.m. the phone rang, and I almost fell out of my chair. Doug had a new idea. He had chased smoke and run a pack string in this country for many years and he knew every hidden place in it. This time he asked me to go up Imnaha Creek past the springs and hold to the right a few degrees. There would be another small stream to cross, then follow it up until the fire was spotted.

The going was rough, especially following the stream. Thick vine maples tripped me and slowed my progress. Soon I smelled smoke, in fact it burned my lungs a little; but it almost smelled good. I sat down and studied the tree tops. Sometimes a man can walk right past a burning tree and never see it, unless he looks up high. Then there it was. Up ahead of me about a hundred feet a huge limb came crashing down from the tree tops. A cloud of smoke burst from the pile of debris. I had found the fire!

From here on, there would be some positive action taken. Lightning had struck a big Douglas fir that was nearly two hundred feet high and six feet in diameter. The top forty feet had been knocked out by the lightning strike and there were splinters scattered a hundred yards in every direction. It's funny I hadn't noticed these when I walked up the creek. Below the broken top of the tree was a large, deformed limb that grew straight out from the trunk and then turned up to form a second tree top. That was the part that fell from the tree as I was sniffing the air for smoke.

Doug sounded delighted when I told him the news and described the situation. We agreed that we would need extra equipment and manpower to get the big tree down. Doug took care of that and in short order. There was a set of fallers, two loggers on their way with a chain saw and other equipment to lay the big tree down. Four fire fighters were sent along to help fight the fire after the big tree was on the ground. These men were enroute from Butte Falls Ranger Station.

Meanwhile, using my compass as a guide, I tied white ribbon to tree limbs and bushes marking a straight trail from the fire to the road. It would save a lot of time. The cutters and fire fighters arrived and all the fire packs were left where mine was. They would be safe from sparks and spot fires. The cutters began to size up their big job. First they cut out a foot-wide strip of bark clear around the tree. The fallers could start a wedge easier in solid wood after the back-cut was made.

Burning and charred embers were raining down constantly from the tree and making the falling job very hazardous. One man was sent to watch for falling debris and one of the two sawers watched him. If the watchman signaled,both saw operators would leave the saw and jump clear. Because of hot coals and burning stuff, we tossed shovelfuls of damp earth around the base of the tree for the men to stand on.

In a short while, all the big tree needed was a little push, accomplished by driving a wooden wedge in the back-cut. It lifted up from the stump, teetered for a moment off balance and crashed to the ground with a thunderous roar. Pitch oozed from a large crack in the trunk and covered the ground in places six inches deep, which made it difficult to move around. The top fifty feet of the tree literally blew up when it hit the ground. Fire was everywhere.

For the next two hours there were seven men who never looked up from what we were doing. We were too busy fighting fire. After that, it took several hours to mop it up. Every tiny spark had to be put dead out. It was after midnight when we left the site and headed for Lodgepole. The storm had started several other fires on the forest, but all of them were small and soon controlled.

That was my first real bad fire. This one could have done a lot of damage if left burning for very much longer. None of us ever returned to the site after the forty-eight hour check to see if it stayed dead out.

CHAPTER 24

SENIOR CITIZENS AT NICHOLS CREEK

Lodgepole was the center of attraction for most of our friends and a good many sightseers. I learned to be a public relations man, along with the smoke-chasing and mule skinning jobs, and took great pleasure in telling people what the Forest Service did and where they could go to have fun.

One weekend two elderly men came by and asked about the fishing. They were driving an old Model A Ford that seemed to be loaded down with camping gear. We had seen a truck go up country hauling fish for stocking the small streams in the area. It gave me an idea. I told the old fellows to follow me and I would guarantee they could catch their limits of ten fish each. They seemed very pleased and apparently believed what I was talking about.

They followed me to Nichol's Creek about four miles up the road from Lodgepole. We pulled down into the campground and parked our cars. A glance at the water and I knew that right here in one spot there were at least 40 nice fish. Hatchery trout usually stay in bunches, not going downstream very far from where they are put in. The two men couldn't see the fish,but still didn't doubt my word that there were fish to be caught.

I watched the old gentlemen get their equipment ready. It seemed to take a long time. Finally there was a struggling worm on one of their hooks and the old man hobbled to the stream's edge and tossed it in. The other man hesitated long enough to see what happened. The baited hook had no more than touched the water when a big rainbow took it. The sudden response caught the old fellow off-guard and the fish made a run downstream. The other man was standing on the bank shouting orders to his partner, forgetting that he could be having fun, too. Finally he tossed his baited hook into the water. In seconds a hungry trout grabbed it and the man almost fell down.

I stood by, hoping that neither one would have a stroke or heart attack. Right at the moment the greatest thing in the world was taking place before my eyes. One elderly gentleman was 81 years old and the other was 79. I felt good all over to watch the two of them enjoying a sport seemingly designed for them alone. They were standing on the smooth bank of a little creek, catching trout that could very well have been in a creek at the bottom of a steep rocky canyon, where it would have been impossible for the two of them to go.

The elderly fishermen were laughing and shouting at each other like a couple of young boys, forgetting all about their aches and pains. I watched the 79 year old fellow take a 13 inch trout off his hook. His hands were shaking so bad it seemed to take forever for him to work the hook out of the fish's mouth and rebait it for another cast. Neither of them noticed when I drove away. I knew everything would be fine now, and it would be best to let them have their fun by themselves.

My smoke-chaser car idled along down the road toward Lodgepole in

second gear. The day had now become a complete success. What was happening at Nichol's Creek made me feel mighty good. Just a little effort on my own time had started a chain reaction of pleasures for the two elderly men. They were reliving some of the good times they no doubt had had in their younger days together. Now they would have one last great fish story to tell their friends and relatives. It could very well be their last because of their great ages. I wished there were more opportunities to escort elderly people to a place where they could enjoy life like these two were doing. The excitement of catching real trout from a safe place along a stream would be better than all the pills put together.

I was down at the barn using a curry comb on Tom when the Model A Ford rattled by our driveway. They tooted the horn to let me know everything was okay.

Monday morning started off with a bang. The dog discovered a big porcupine in a willow thicket near the house. He wouldn't leave it alone until it was shot, but he knew enough to stay back. He was well aware of what happened to dogs' noses when they got too close. After the gun was put away, I whistled for the horses and mules and prepared for a long trip to the high country. Tom and Dillon would get to go. We had a big white spooky horse and planned on using him today, too. Of course Molly would be my saddle mare. The big white horse was a bad one. In the first place, he was hard to catch. After being caught, he would try to kick me every chance he got. Putting a pack on the old boy was something to watch. As a matter of fact, it was much safer to watch than do the job.

He was finally cornered, and a halter was on his big jug head, then he tried to kick me and missed. The horse kicked at his own shadow twice while I was leading him toward the hitching rail. I snubbed him up close and tied one hind foot up so he was standing on three legs. With care, the pack saddle was cinched in place and boxes were put on him after packing them with things that wouldn't be damaged too much if he bucked everything off. One mistake was to take the rope off his hind foot before the load was tied down. I tossed the lash cinch over the top and it landed about right, so it could be easily reached from beneath him.

The big horse spooked and went all to pieces. He bucked hard and high. The halter rope broke and he jumped over the hitching rail, continuing to buck and kick like a fool. Boxes flew off and pack rigging began coming apart. At last,all motion stopped and after the dust settled so I could see where he was, we had another little set-to. Then I removed what was left of the pack saddle and turned him loose. Sure was thankful this critter belonged to another district.

My two faithful Government mules walked up the ramp and into the truck like a couple of tame dogs. Smokey and Molly followed close behind. I tied them in place, closed the tailgate and prepared to pull out. Up the little hill and over the cattleguard was sort of rough and for the next six miles the road was bumpy and full of turns. My horses and mules knew exactly how the truck would go over any road in the country and would lean into every turn and brace themselves for every bump that they must have memorized. You could hardly tell there were four animals weighing between 800 and 1400 pounds each on

the truck. They always seemed to enjoy riding along as the wind blew their manes and tails.

At the beginning of the Seven Lakes Trail at Black Bear Camp, I packed up and climbed into the saddle for a long enjoyable ride. Molly felt so good between my knees. No matter how hard the job was, or how many hours or days it took, it was a privilege to have this job. I was the only packer on the district, indeed on the Forest and felt it set me apart from everyone else. I could do something no one else could do.

About three and a half miles up we took another trail down through King Spruce Canyon. Some of the largest Engleman Spruce on the Forest grew here. Some of them were up to six feet in diameter. Several deer ran as we crossed King Spruce Flat and headed up the other side toward Gopher Ridge on the breaks of the Middle Fork of the Rogue River. Springs rushed from the hillside everywhere and cascaded down across the trail and disappeared into the canyon below. Tall slender alpine fir grew thick everywhere. That is my favorite tree. There was always fresh bear and elk tracks in this part of the country. My black terrier, Snoopy, saw his first bear along this trail.

We came out on top of the ridge and headed across a long narrow flat meadow. The Alta Lake Trail cut across the east end. Then I rode to the Lake Ivern and Middle Fork Trail Junction. It was an eight mile ride from here to the river over an almost impassible trail. It was nice to sit there and admire the country to the east, where thirty miles of the Skyline Trail crossed the Forest. Ranger Springs country looked inviting. The timber covered thousands of acres, almost unbroken in every direction.

After a moment or two of meditation, we continued on south, past Boulder Pond until a nest of yellow jackets broke the spell. Tom always ran and Dillon would stop and try to kick the daylights out of the hot little bees before he finally got underway. The mule blocked the trail as he kicked with lightning speed. Tom, in his haste, slammed into him and knocked him over. Smokey always went to pieces at times like that. Molly laid her ears back, stretched her neck way out and we were almost airborne, it seemed. She outran everyone else.

The dust cleared and everything was still together, so we proceeded on up the trail. At the north end of Alta Lake, two big mule deer bucks, a four-point and a six-point, bounded over the top of Violet Hill. I never tire of looking at Alta Lake, always a beautiful sight with its clear blue water stretching for three-quarters of a mile. Shasta and mountain hemlock trees grow right to the waters edge, and heather, at least a foot deep, grows thick among the trees. Legal-sized Eastern Brook trout broke the surface of the lake to grab a bug. This was the ideal spot to stop and rest up. I unpacked and loosened saddle cinches, then with my saddle bags over my shoulder, Snoopy and I went down to the lake to eat our lunches.

As we sat by the lake enjoying our lunch, I thought again how wonderful it was to be able to come to a spot like this and dream. The beauty and solitude helped a person collect his thoughts and be able to look far into the future. It was a quiet God-made place where a person could lose their thoughts and lift their spirits once more. I hated to leave this beautiful place at the foot of Violet Hill, but there was work to do and we must move on.

Two mule loads of supplies were left at Devil's Peak Lookout, then on

down a steep ridge toward the Skyline Trail we went with the third load for the trail crew. The trail crosses the ridge in a saddle between Devil's Peak and Lee's Peak. At the saddle, we turned north toward Seven Lakes Basin and would spend some time fixing holes in the pasture fence at Grass Lake. Tom and Dillon would enjoy a short rest, eating meadow grass near the lake edge. Each time a fish jumped and splashed in the water, Dillon would jump and flap his big ears.

It was 4:00 o'clock when we headed out of the canyon toward the west rim. The trail crew touched off a blast just before quitting time. We forded a small creek and crossed a flat meadow. At the far edge of the opening were several large trees with the roots exposed. One had been cut in two where it crossed the trail and the center was rotted away and resembled a tube driven slant-ways into the ground. As we went past, the sound and vibration of the horse's and mules' feet caused some unrest in a hornet's nest built in the hollow root. Bald hornets have excellent eyesight and their aim is perfect.

Tom got stung first then Dillon got hit by several bees all at once, just as the trail crew set off another charge of dynamite. The mules took off through the timber, their tails going around and around so fast they looked blurred. Molly outran Smokey with ease. She loved to run. We made good time for several hundred yards, which helped us reach the rim before dark.

After a short stop to make sure the stock was okay, we set out on a steady pace for the long ride home. Again I watched the sun set behind the mountains and felt the cool air settling down. My jacket felt good as I tugged it over my shoulders and buttoned it up. Night noises started as the day noises ceased. Another perfect day was drawing to a close, another good day spent with my Government mules.

CHAPTER 25

CABIN ON HONEYMOON CREEK

My next pack trip was scheduled for Seven Lakes Basin country. There were three mule-loads of food and equipment for the snow survey cabin located just off the Skyline Trail. We were restocking the cabin for the winter crew. Everything had to be taken in by pack string during the summer months so the men wouldn't have to carry any supplies or equipment when they went in to measure the snow.

A pickup load of supplies arrived at Lodgepole at daylight, and I was all ready to start the trip. Each animal carried over 200 pounds. When I packed the food, one thing seemed a little strange to me, the labels had been taken off all the canned goods, and the contents of the cans written on each with black pen. Each can was dated. The reason for this was that some of the canned food might not be used for a long time. Mice or rats might chew the wrappers off, or dampness might cause the paper to fall off the can. If the food had not been used at the end of the third year, it was destroyed and replaced.

The first mile up the trail was peaceful and quiet and I had a chance to see how my three-mule pack string was loaded and the string could get their second wind. It didn't last long. Tom jerked away and started running, and Dillon was carrying on like he had been wired to a light socket. Smokey stood there, her eyes bugged out but not for long. He had encountered a yellow jacket's nest in a different place along the trail.

How a mule can find the strength to move so freely and be so agile, loaded with 200 pounds, is beyond me. Tom fairly ran right out from under his pack saddle, and Dillon filled out his rigging in a couple of places and busted a britchin strap and tore a buckle loose from his breast collar. Smokey stepped in a stump-hole and fell flat. Molly took me up the trail at a fast rate of speed though she hadn't been stung. She knew what was going on.

I had to repack everybody. Smokey acted embarrassed. Repacked, we moved along up the trail and started through a dense stand of hemlock and Shasta fir. A yearling bear was coming down the trail full-tilt. Tom and Dillon didn't get too shook up, but Smokey got completely unstrung. She just knew the little bear was going to eat her alive. Molly was startled for a minute but settled down quickly. The bear saw us and bounded off the trail down through the brush and disappeared. Smokey snapped a britchen strap as she reared and bounded away; but after minor repairs, we continued up the trail over the ridge and down across the Seven Lakes Basin.

Molly, Tom and Dillon are in more movie pictures than some Hollywood actors. At each lake we rode past, there were several campers who had movie cameras; and I was often asked to hold up for good shots. We posed, rode in circles and moved off through the timber. Molly always pranced around and put on a good show.

Doug had given me instructions on how to locate the remote cabin. I kept my eyes open for the landmark on the Skyline Trail. When it was spotted, I looked up and down the trail to make certain no one was in sight. All was clear, and we headed across country toward our landmark, visible in the distance. We rode up through the timber and out across several little meadows. Beyond a mile, the country opened up; but there was no cabin in sight. We rode a quarter-mile circle, searching, and still no cabin. There was nothing to do but back-track to the Skyline Trail and start over.

This time I used the compass and sat in the saddle taking a compass shot across country. We followed this course for about 1/2 mile until it led up a little hill. Right away I spotted a black stovepipe; and as we went higher, the cabin roof came into view. At the top of the ridge there was the little cabin just a few yards away. It stood on a shelf on the side of a hill and was protected by tall timber all around it.

The neat little cabin was built of peeled logs and was about twenty-four feet long and eighteen feet wide. It had two entrances, a regular door on one end and another one high in the eve of the roof. The door in the eve was for entry in winter when the snow was deep. The men often had to dig down three or four feet to reach the gable entrance. A ladder went from there to the floor inside the cabin. There was only one window and it was covered with a heavy shutter.

The interior was neatly arranged. On each side of the gable entrance ladder, firewood was stacked to the roof, wall to wall. Against the back wall stood a table with a well built cupboard containing dishes and pots and pans above it. A quart fruit jar, in plain sight, was filled with matches. A tight lid on the jar kept the mice and rats out of it. Near the table was the wood cook stove, mounted on top of a cement, freezeproof locker. A base was poured on the ground and extended up through the floor. The sides and top were about six inches thick and had a heavy insulated door in one side. Inside the locker was about three feet square and two feet high. It held an amazing amount of food. There were four bunk beds, two on either side of the door. A large mouse-proof chest was located on the opposite side of the gable crawl hole. The furniture included four folding chairs, a Coleman lantern and a small bookcase with a few magazines. I know one thing for sure, if ever I have a chance, I will build a cabin just like that, some place for myself. What a pleasure it would be to go there and just enjoy life.

I looked the cabin over, then unpacked and stored the food and supplies in their proper places. The job was finished in a couple of hours and we headed home. Reaching the ridge top, I took one more long look at the little cabin. It resembled a cabin I saw once as a kid in a Mother Goose story. It seemed so lonely back there all by itself. All it had to do now was wait for the first snowflakes to fall and settle on its roof, then millions more to cover it until it would be only a hump in the landscape.

Out of curiosity I rode north up the ridge to see if we would cross the horse tracks from the first trip. Molly walked about a hundred and fifty feet and turned to the left. I looked and there were our tracks. When I looked in the direction of the cabin, it was completely hidden from sight. Every once in awhile I think about that little cabin and wish I could spend a week or two living in it.

Smokey kept lagging behind to eat huckleberry brush and sedge, so I ended up leading her. Tom and Dillon followed along behind with their lead ropes tied up to their pack saddles. On the way past Cliff Lake, we stopped to rest and to repair a picnic table. Also to pick up a few tin cans that thoughtless campers had left scattered around. I finished the cleanup and prepared to pull out and was ready to swing up into the saddle when the horses and mules spotted a movement near the lake. There was a full grown brown and black bear walking on a log that had fallen across the outlet of Cliff Lake.

I grabbed Snoopy and started toward the bear, keeping a sizeable tree between us and the animal. We could get a close look, and Snoopy should have fun trying to put the big animal up a tree. When we were within fifty feet of the bear, I jumped from behind the tree and threw a rock as Snoopy took out after the bear. The big animal tore bark off the log as he dug in to get better traction. Snoopy took off in hot pursuit. They both disappeared heading toward Middle Lake. The big bear was making the huckleberry brush fairly rattle as he gained speed. Snoopy was gone about twenty minutes.

Molly was excited as I climbed into the saddle and started for home. As we hit the trail, I thought some about what had just taken place. Suppose the bear had turned and run toward me? Surely the horses and mules would have run off, and I would have been left afoot. I visualized myself climbing a tree and looking down into the broad face of a hungry bear, and right then decided never again to pull a stunt like that. Snoopy finally caught up with me and kept looking over his shoulder like something was after him, and his hair was standing on end. Maybe the bear had stopped running and took a swipe at him. Snoopy never put the big bear up a tree.

We rode past an old snow survey cabin at South Lake to see if it had survived the heavy winter snows of last year and noticed that Snoopy's feet were getting sore. His left front foot was bleeding. Snoopy covered about three miles for every one mile I rode down the trail. If my calculations were correct, Snoopy had covered over fifty miles already today. From here on, he rode behind my saddle until we got to the truck about nine miles down the trail.

Riding down the trail, my thoughts started to drift as usual. It was nearing the end of another perfect day that could never have happened without my Government mules, Tom and Dillon. I didn't know it then, but the time wasn't too far off when some stupid costly time-consuming machine would be introduced to the forest because someone would be fool enough to believe they could take the place of a mule. The mules and horses would be sold before the person who did the deed found out that he had made a sad mistake.

The machines might kill, cripple or maim a dozen trail crew men; but the blame would always be put on the operator, never on the pet contraption. In a years time, they would cause more trouble, lose more money and time, than ten good mules ever would. One thing I knew for sure; as long as I could throw a hitch and tie down a load and be able to climb into the saddle and ride down the trail, I would be happy. Some of the romance of leading a string of pack mules down the trail would be kept alive. When the Rogue River National Forest gets rid of their pack mules entirely, they will come and pick them up from my corral. If I hear of a district that decides to add their mules to the transfer list, I will do everything I can to get them transferred to my district.

When the last mule is gone, that will be the end of an era that used to be such an important part of the old U. S. Forest Service. That indeed will be a very sad day.

Cliff Lake, Seven Lakes Basin

CHAPTER 26

LIGHTNING STRIKE ON BESSIE CREEK

A lightning storm was brewing in the southeast, and another one was building up at the north end of the forest. I called Doug and he told me there were three fires going already on the Umpqua Divide, but that I should stay at Lodgepole on standby in case another fire showed up. Also there was one hot strike that had set a fire on Bessie Creek. Hal, the guard at Imnaha, was ready to go the minute Doug called him and told him the story. His smoke-chasing car was a Studebaker sedan, with the back seat taken out to form a nice platform to lay his fire pack on. He got to the fire in short order and started digging a fireline around it. Meanwhile, Doug sent Corbett Smith to give Hal a hand.

The two men did well. It took about three hours of good honest hard work to dig a fairly good line around the fire. There was still a lot of mop-up work to be done which was a vital part to pay attention to on this fire, because it was near a logged-over area. There was a lot of brush and limbs - logging slash which would burn hot and spread fast if the fire ever got to it.

Doug told Hal and Corb to stay there all night and take turns sleeping. He would send two more men to the fire at daylight to relieve them. The night air was cool and caused the fire to lay low, and it looked completely harmless. It would be rough trying to get any rest here because the men didn't have sleeping bags. Supper had been C rations.

Hal thought it would be a good idea to sneak back to Imnaha, eat some wholesome food and sleep for a few hours on a good bed. They could be back at the fire at daylight. Corbett didn't want to leave, but at last he consented. Hal and Corb headed for Imnaha about twenty miles away. While the two tired smoke-chasers slept soundly in comfortable beds, things began to happen at the fire.

The men had finished digging the fireline after dark. There was one dry, rotten, tree root which extended from a burning stump across the fireline. It was just under the surface so it couldn't be seen, unless they had looked closely. The tree root was pitchy and full of cracks. It burned fast across the foot-wide fireline. As soon as the tiny flame reached the dry needles and duff outside the fireline, it took off. The time was then around 11:00 p.m. A fire creates its own wind and it didn't take it long to get under way. It reached the logged-over area in short order and started burning in the big piles of debris. The wind picked up; and in another hour, there were over twenty acres on fire and the flames were spreading fast.

Our man on Bessie Rock had a habit of setting his clock for midnight and 3:00 a.m. He would roll out and take a complete look around his area of responsibility when the alarm rang, even though Doug never expected him to do this. The midnight alarm went off and the boy got up and rubbed his eyes

so he could see good. The first thing that registered was the smell of wood smoke. The second was the bright glow in the sky southwest of him. A quick check showed the fire to be exactly where he had turned it in before Hal was sent out to it.

Ordinarily, our man could move about his small house in the dark with ease, but the shock of seeing all the countryside on fire caused some funny things to happen. He headed for the forest radio and in his haste, he banged his knee on the corner of the bed. It hurt so bad that it threw him off course, and he stumbled over a chair that had a three gallon bucket of water sitting on it. He hit the floor and tried to outrun the water, but the table was in the way. Sopping wet, he started to get up and banged his head. By now he was beginning to wonder if maybe he was having a bad dream. The cold water took all the cobwebs out of his head, and he decided to call Doug on the telephone instead of using his radio.

Every fireman on the district was jumpy as a cat, especially when the telephone rang in the middle of the night. He got an answer from Doug on the first ring. At Lodgepole, I jumped up and headed for the telephone to find out what was cooking. The sleeping boys at Imnaha listened in along with Rustler Peak, Blue Rock and Camp Two. The news came to Hal and Corbett as a great shock. The rest of us were wide awake and ready to go.

Gordon Jesse Walker – Log Hauling Days

Doug told me to head on down to Butte Falls to pick up a 500 gallon pumper truck. He would have a helper on hand by the time I got there. There is something about a fire that completely changes a man's thought processes and actions. It seemed like I couldn't get to Butte Falls fast enough. No one else was there when I arrived, which gave me a chance to check out the rig and make sure there was a tankful of water. A pair of headlights showed up near the warehouse. It was Gene Ward, the man who would ride with me on the pumper.

It was a long hard slow grind to drive the six ton tanker from Butte Falls to the fire, a distance of about 35 miles. Gene slept nearly all the way. We arrived around 3:30 in the morning and by then the fire had covered at least 35 of the 40 acre logged-over area. Doug had rounded up two or three logging crews and sent them to the fire. One logging operator had a D-8 tractor with dozer blade working about two miles from the fire. He drove the tractor to the fire and dozed out a wide fireline. By daylight, there were thirty men and one woman, all loggers, on the fire, in addition to twelve Forest Service crewmen. The loggers had brought two dozers, three pumpers and plenty of saws and hand tools. We all joined together to knock down a killer of the forest.

The attractive lady logger was an expert at loading logging trucks. When I hauled logs for a living, I drove my truck to a logging operation owned by Hanson and Nickolson. This woman was standing near the controls of a McVay log loader. I supposed she was a truck driver's wife visiting because there was a man standing nearby. While I waited to get a load, it was interesting to visit with the other truck drivers. We were down out of sight and could not see the loader working. Then it was my turn, I backed my rig in place and jumped up on the truck to hook a line to my trailer to lift it off my truck. I looked back and saw that the woman was at the controls and could hardly believe my eyes. I remember thinking, "Boy, here is where there will be some broken springs on my truck."

She lowered my trailer, and I hooked it to my truck and coupled the air brake hoses together. The head loader motioned me into place. The woman picked up a buckskin second cut and dropped it toward the bunks. Inches before it landed, she stopped the log and lowered it as light as a feather into place. She put a load on my truck that balanced perfectly. I hauled it seventy miles to a sawmill and never once worried about being overloaded because it pulled so easy. When my load of logs crossed the scales on the State Highway, it was 5600 pounds overweight, which cost me 1¢ a pound. My load weighed 77,600 pounds. On the job, the woman played a big part as a member of the crew. She was the one who operated the machine, loading logs on the trucks for many years and later loaded my truck several times. Of all the millions of board feet of timber I hauled, she was the best log loader (jammer puncher) I ever saw. Her name was Liz Bush.

We fought fire all day and all night and until the middle of the second day. The smoke choked us and our eyes were swollen and red. The dry ashes stuck to our sweaty bodies until we were black. At last the fire was knocked down, and half the crew could take a break. By evening, Doug released the logging crews. It would be several days before the Forest Service men were done mopping-up. Every spark had to be dead out or the fire might take off again.

A fresh bunch of Forest Service men came in to relieve the first twelve. Gene and I rode home in a half-ton pickup with a driver and slept nearly all the way home.

The fire was a bad one; but thanks to our alert lookout and the willing loggers, it was spotted in time and controlled. For the next few days, the fire was patrolled constantly. Here was an example of what can happen when a smoke-chaser doesn't do as he is told. Hal and Corbett learned a lesson. Sleeping or resting on the hard ground wouldn't have been near as bad as what they finally had to face. Had they been there, it would have been a simple matter to knock it down with a few shovelfuls of dirt.

Gordon Jesse Walker

CHAPTER 27

THE BOY FROM TENNESSEE

When the packing started in the spring, the first few trips were to pack the lookouts into their stations. This year Bessie Rock was the second one. After a good nights sleep, what was left of it after the Devil's Peak trip, I headed toward Bessie Rock by 7:00 a.m. The fellow who would be manning the tower drove ahead in his car, and I followed with four head of stock in my truck. This was the third ride of the season and the horses and mules had to get used to balancing themselves.

Between Lodgepole and the end of the Bessie Creek Road were twenty-five miles of gravelled road. The two worst parts were the steep twisting grades down into South Fork and Middle Fork of Rogue River. The descent to the Middle Fork, about a mile long, was the steepest and crookedest of the two. It was at the top of this grade that I nearly lost my truck over the bluff above the river.

In the spring of the year, the log haulers come back to work as early as the weather allows. Most of the trucks were diesels with dual-drive rear-ends and dual axle trailers that are capable of hauling up to 8,000 board feet of logs. I had hauled logs for three years myself, and knew what those drivers had in mind – to make all the trips they could, which meant drive fast and hard. Most of the drivers were paid so much per 1,000 board feet. Two loaded trucks were following me down grade. Each one weighed about 80,000 pounds, load and all, which made my one-and-a-half ton truck loaded with two horses and two mules look pretty small.

There were three empty trucks following each other up the grade. As I broke down around a sharp turn, Smokey slipped and fell on her side. The road was so steep that she slid clear to the cab of the truck knocking Tom and Dillon flat, and my mare landed on top of Smokey. It is difficult to describe all that took place in the next five minutes. There was plenty of action back there that caused my truck to bounce around and swing from side to side, barely missing an empty truck. Of all the squealing and thumping, I never heard the like before.

Two of the rough-neck truck drivers nearly drove off the grade laughing at us. Two other drivers shook their heads in sympathy. Surely they must have had a soft spot in their hearts for a packer and his mules. It was hard to hold the horse-truck out of the ditch and away from the trucks coming uphill and not be able to stop. The heavy loads behind me wouldn't be able to stop because other loaded rigs were behind them.

It seemed like a long time before we got down the steep grade to a turnout by the river bridge. I looked back through the cab window once and saw Tom's foot passing up and down in front of my face. He was still down, with one of the other animals laying almost on top of him. There was literally a pile of horse

and mule flesh pawing, squealing and floundering, trying to get up again. After the truck was well out of the roadway, I shut off the motor, put the truck in gear and set the brakes. Then I climbed up on the side of the rack, leaned down over the frightened animals and started talking to them. The sound of my voice calmed them down to where I could start unravelling the mess.

As each horse and mule was loaded, a heavy rope was stretched from one side and anchored to the other side of the rack. The purpose was to keep them in their places so they would not move around as they rode along. The stock always rode sideways, instead of straight ahead. When Smokey fell down, both horses and mules were down under the ropes and it was impossible to get up. As I patted and talked to them, Smokey was the first to relax. I unsnapped the rope. My horse was the next one to get up. Dillon got up and shook himself with great dignity and acted like he had been grossly insulted. Tom heaved a sigh of relief because he had been on the bottom of the pile most of the time.

As it turned out, no one was hurt, just shattered nerves and in Dillon's case a little embarrassment. At the end of the Bessie Creek Road, I unloaded the stock and packed three of them with supplies for the lookout. The man who was going to live there through fire season was almost to the lookout before we caught up with him. Bessie Rock wasn't a place where people liked to stay too well. We were hopeful that this new man would stay for the duration, but were almost sure he wouldn't. He might last two weeks.

Some of the oddest things would happen when I packed a man and his supplies into Bessie Rock, and then packed him and his things out a couple of weeks later. My prediction was right. Our boy from Tennessee barely lasted the two weeks out. He had bragged about what a good rider he was, and said he had owned a saddle horse for most of his life. The day he came down, I led Smokey in so he could ride with me to Imnaha, eight miles away. I managed to get all his things on two mules. We headed down the trail, me in the lead with the mules; and he followed along behind on Smokey. I took a look to see how he was doing, just as Smokey reared up on her hind legs and pawed the air. She nearly went over backwards down a steep rock slide when her hind feet caved off the berm of the trail. He had her chin pulled back against her neck like a Tennessee Walking Horse. Smokey thought this was pure foolishness and wasn't about to be controlled like that by such a weird rider.

I yelled at him to slack off on the reins before she dumped him off. He didn't have to be told twice and hung on to the very tip-ends of the six foot reins from then on. Of course, the horse he had owned was a Tennessee Walking Horse; and my guess is that is the way they are trained. Smokey didn't go for any such nonsense as strutting down the trail with her chin held back against her neck like that and looking like an idiot.

Smokey was always the one selected to carry the people to their summer homes and carry them out again in the fall, or whenever one needed a ride. One of the young fellows decided to ride Smokey bareback. With his fishing pole in hand, he jumped up on her back. The tip of his pole poked her in the flank and she bucked him off before he ever left the corral at Imnaha.

The boy from Tennessee was well on his way home by the time Doug found another fellow to put up on Bessie Rock. His name was Hank Brown. Hank was born and raised in Arkansas. He was tall and lanky, neat, clean and sharp

as a tack. He was very trusting and would believe anything we told him. He wouldn't ride Smokey; said he could make better time walking and have a lot more fun. He was sitting at the bottom of the ladder at the foot of Bessie Rock when we rode up with his belongings.

He watched every move I made as the mules were unpacked and cinches loosened. We loaded his things on the cable-car to be pulled up later. Climbing the 96 foot ladder didn't bother him in the least. He chattered like a magpie all the way to the top, while I was trying my best to concentrate on hanging on. We cranked the winch and pulled the loaded car to the top. After we unloaded and stored the food and other articles, I started the task of training Hank for his new job.

After a lecture on the Osborne firefinder and some map study, he plotted out a rock slide and an open glade to see how accurate he could locate them. The rock slide was a mile away and the glade about six. Hank passed his test very well. The next step was to learn the country and be able to identify known peaks and mountains. This would help him to describe any area using landmark locations. After a few more housekeeping tips and bits of advice about the job, I put my saddle bags over my shoulder and proceeded to climb down the long ladder to the ground.

I tightened the cinches on the pack saddles, climbed up into my saddle and waved at Hank as I rode down around a switchback and out of sight. I knew there were plenty of unanswered questions, but it would be up to Hank to jot them down. They would be answered when we came back in a couple of days with repair materials for the lookout house.

The young fellow on Devil's Peak was married and his wife joined him a couple of days after the lookout was opened up. They had been married only a few days when he got the job, and being on Devil's Peak was a perfect place for a honeymoon. They were always glad to see me. As I rode in on my second trip to Devil's Peak, they greeted me and watched as the mules were unpacked. My dog always found his sleeping place under the bed in the lookout house. He would rest there until I was ready to hit the trail again. He liked it there because it was cool and no one would step on him.

He ran under the bed and came face to face with a half-grown collie, already asleep in his favorite spot. He tied into the surprised pup and peeled a strip of hide off one side of his nose. The collie took off out the door and hid behind a pile of rock nearby.

The couple checked off the supplies against their list to make sure nothing was missing. Everything checked out except there were no cross-hairs for the firefinder sight. He mentioned the missing item, and I told him he didn't look very hard because there was plenty of horse-hair, more than he would ever need.

Tom mule stood still as I patted him on the neck and told him what a good mule he was and how he could contribute a little more of himself to the cause of fire detection. I worked my way back toward Tom's tail, patting him as I went and kept saying kind things to him - mostly for the benefit of the couple watching. Then I took hold of Tom's tail and yanked several long, black hairs from it and walked over and handed them to the man's wife. These were mule hairs, but they would work every bit as good as horsehair. Tom mule didn't

seem to mind at all. The couple looked on in disbelief but realized they were on the receiving end of a prank.

During the six years I packed food and supplies to the lookouts, trail and fire crews and encouraged everyone to order anything they wanted. Food is the single most important item that helps to keep the morale of a working man high, especially an isolated fire lookout. The newlyweds took me at my word and their order included a dozen fresh peaches, a dozen large tomatoes and eight dozen eggs. There were also six loaves of bread and some cookies. I took great pride in the fact that all these articles had arrived in as good condition as when they were picked up at the store. Tom and Dillon had carried the packs over nine miles of trail, had bucked through one yellow jacket nest and nothing was damaged!

Soon I bade the good people farewell and headed down the trail. The long ride toward home was always a reward after a rough day in the saddle, although this had been one of the better days. The sun was almost down and deep shadows set in fast as we dropped downhill and rode into the tall timber. Tonight it took a little longer than usual to get home because we went down the old original Seven Lakes Trail in the dark to see what it would be like for excitement.

Loaded and Ready to Ride

CHAPTER 28

WINTERIZING THE LOOKOUTS

Doug and I got together the next day at Lodgepole and discussed plans to close down the three lookouts remaining in use. When the storm hit the high country, the people on Blue Rock and Rustler Peak packed up and moved out completely. Bessie Rock packed out all he could on his back. I would ride in later and bring out everything else and shut the place up for the winter. Meanwhile, we were sorting out camping gear and spreading out tents so they could dry. It took all day to get things back to normal. The sun did start to shine again about 11:00 o'clock and things looked a little brighter.

The following day, I headed toward Bessie Rock to see if I could ride in and shut the place up. It looked pretty white in the high country. It could be rough going especially if there was a couple of feet of snow on top of the lookout shutters. Snoopy was rested and alert. Every movement drew his attention as we drove toward Bessie Creek. As he rode along with his front feet on the dash, he was brave enough to tackle any animal from a big white-face bull on down. Every time we met a small herd of cows or deer coming down from the high country, Snoopy would bristle up and snap and growl furiously until we drove by.

I turned off the Butte Falls-Prospect Road onto the Bessie Creek Road and headed east. The altitude would increase slowly; and before long, fresh snow should start showing up in the trees and openings. Several small bunches of black-tail deer and a few mule-tail deer were working their way down, and the road seemed to be the way of least resistance. I counted nine black Galloway cattle on their way off the Halifax range. They reminded me of black bear. Snoopy would have liked to try his luck on running one up a tree.

Signs of fresh snow appeared about four miles up Bessie Creek, and it got steadily whiter and deeper. The last creek crossing showed about five inches of snow and no track broke. The weight of the stock gave my truck traction enough to keep going. At Bessie Shelter, near the trailhead the snow was fourteen inches deep and the truck spun out before I could turn it around. This was the first time I had got a truck stuck with 3,000 pounds of horses and mules on board. With some shoveling and manipulating, it eased its way into place where we usually unloaded.

Tom and Dillon were amazed at the difference. They poked their noses deep into the snow and came up with mouths full like kids eating cotton candy. Snoopy rolled and tumbled like a little black seal until Dillon ran him down the road snorting and rearing up on his hind legs. The black dog planed out on top of the white stuff and fairly flew to stay out of reach of the playful mule.

I tied the empty boxes and bags on Tom and Dillon and pulled the cinch up a little on Molly, then headed toward Bessie Rock. There is a steep mountainside where the trail switches back several times to reach the top. The

snow got deep fast. At each switchback, it would be five or six inches deeper. At the top where the trail started to level off, Molly began to flounder in the deep snow. My tapaderos dragged. Blobs of snow fell from the tall trees, nearly covering whatever they landed on. The snow got too deep for the stock to travel in and was sticking to the front and bottom of the pack boxes Dillon carried. He was the smallest animal. Snoopy was riding behind the saddle; he couldn't make it on his own at all.

In a small opening, I turned Molly around and managed to ride back past the mules, then turned to look back. They were peering around their packs to see if I had disappeared. Dillon raised himself up on his hind legs and walked around like a circus mule until he got lined up with the trail. Then he came down again on all fours. Tom did almost exactly the same trick, except he turned in the opposite direction; but he was just as catty. I hated to give up but it was impossible to go on. Tom and Dillon would have followed me, no matter where I went; but even they knew it was no use.

We drove slowly back to Lodgepole, and I spent the rest of the day combing out Tom and Dillon's tails and grooming the horses for winter. Soon now I would haul the horses and mules to their winter pasture on Bowen Creek. This would be a good time to drive down and go around the four hundred acre pasture fence to make sure it was horse-proof.

I spent the night with my family in Butte Falls and in the morning stopped by the office to talk to Doug. He agreed that the pasture fence should be maintained and also mentioned some repair to the feed rack and that I should look over the barn for loose boards. Snoopy rode with me, excited to be going someplace where he could run and chase small animals. The jack rabbits really gave him a run for his money and there were plenty of them around.

It took me two days to get the fence back in shape. A herd of elk had knocked down about a quarter of a mile in the northwest side of it. Bowen Creek runs from one side of the pasture to the other, and where the fence crossed the creek on the south side, Snoopy found the remains of a deer. A cougar had made a kill, eaten part of the carcass and then covered the rest with some loose dirt and twigs. It was in a heavily shaded place by the creek with thick brush and tall trees around, and standing there looking down on it gave me a creepy feeling. Snoopy stayed near me most of the time and this made me a little more anxious.

During the last two days the weather had turned off hot and the new snow that fell on Mount McLoughlin and the surrounding high country was almost gone now. It began to look like Snoopy and I would be running the pack string again soon.

Thursday and Friday Doug and I worked hard closing down Camp Two Guard Station. It took a lot of work to get a place winterized. Doug said that if the weather held good over the weekend, we should plan on closing Bessie Rock the following Monday. To spend a whole weekend with my family was unusual and it was nice. The kids and I had a lot of fun, but about 10:00 p.m. Sunday night Snoopy and 1 headed for Lodgepole. We would make an early start from there. A helper would meet me at the end of the trail around 8:00 Monday morning and the two of us would close down the lookout for the winter.

Early Monday morning Snoopy and I headed down the road with Tom and Dillon plus good old Smokey. Molly had her place in the front of the truck where she first learned to ride. The ground was white with frost and the air was crisp and cold. Snoopy was content to ride along with his side window rolled up tight so the air from the truck heater would hit him full force. There were a lot of deer along the road and cattle were bunched up along the way and moving downhill. In fact, a lot of animals, large and small, were running to and fro as though they were racing each other. By their actions, I knew another storm was brewing, even though the sky was cloudless.

John was ahead of me and waiting at the trailhead. He stood back out of my way until the mules and Smokey were packed and ready. I fixed a pack cover in the center of the sawbuck pack saddle on Smokey so John could ride up to the lookout. He would have to walk out, but it was all downhill coming home. We rode easily up the switchbacks toward Snow Brush Gulch where a week ago the fresh snow had been so deep we couldn't make it. Now there wasn't a trace of snow anywhere, not even on the north side of Bessie Rock, as we found when we got to the top.

We made good time getting to the lookout, and the weather was so warm we worked in our shirt-sleeves. John cranked the cable car up to the top of the rock while I lugged the boxes of food and other things to the loading ramp by the catwalk. The first load slid over the edge easily as John worked the brake on the winch. I climbed down the ninety-six foot ladder to the landing below and unloaded the car. We let two more loads down so we would have nothing left to do on top except tie down the shutters and lock the door.

Then we sat down to eat our lunches and enjoy a fabulous view. Mount Shasta and Black Butte loomed high and bright over a hundred miles to the south. The fall atmosphere was pure,with no haze or clouds to obstruct the visibility and we could see mountain tops no one had seen from Bessie Rock for a long time. I felt sad when I remembered that today was the end of another beautiful summer of frequent pack trips to and from Bessie Rock.

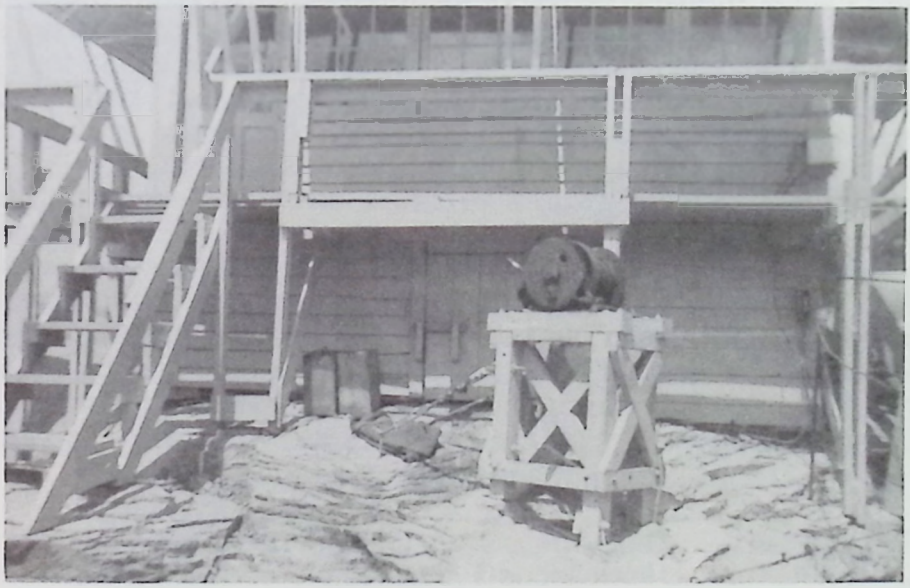
Mount McLoughlin, the landmark of the Rogue River Valley, loomed high, nearly 10,000 feet, and was so clear cut with its snowy cap against the bright blue sky. Southwest of us the Coast Range displayed snow-capped peaks, with purple canyons streaking up and down. The round knob of Dutchman Peak stood out among all the other peaks on the west end of the Siskiyous. That was where my old smoke-chasing buddy, Hal Von Stein and his wife, Edna, spent their summers, looking and watching for fire in the forest. Wagner Butte and Mount Ashland were lined up east of Dutchman; and looking over our shoulders to the northeast, we could see Union Peak jutting sharply into the sky, and could see white patches of snow in the many cracks and ledges on its dark, gray, rock sides. Red Blanket Mountain blocked out our northern view, but the beauty of Red Blanket Canyon made up for it. It was truly a beautiful spot.

With lunch over, we reluctantly pulled our thoughts together and got back to the job at hand. It was a two hour job to let the shutters down on Bessie Rock Lookout . In order to let them down, a guy wire had to be taken loose. After the shutter was down, it had to be tied back together again. Each guy wire had a heavy duty turnbuckle to speed up the operation. Three of them were easy

to take apart, but the one on the southeast corner was tricky. I put a safety belt on and tied a new rope to it, then anchored the other end of the fifty foot rope to two different places on the house.

After checking over the rigging carefully a couple of times, I let myself down over the side of the rock and took the guy wire loose. John kept one eye on me while he let the shutters down on the east side. At the end of my rope, it was about four hundred feet straight down to the jagged rocks below. When I glanced down, it made me feel a little sick and the half-inch rope seemed like a thread! In places like this you aren't allowed to make any mistakes because there would be no second chance.

At last the shutters were fastened tight, and I covered the firefinder with a sleeping bag sheet. We shut and locked the door and put the door shutter in place. One more task at the foot of the ladder and we would be ready to move out. The lookout had a five hundred gallon wooden tank to catch rain water, not for drinking but to wash clothes and for taking baths. At Bessie Rock, drinking water was packed in by the lookout man from a spring about two miles away. Each fall we cleaned the tank and drained out all the water. A heavy cover was placed over it to protect it from winter storms. Then we headed for the truck.



Bessie Rock Lookout

John took off on foot ahead of me and would be halfway home before I even reached the trailhead. Alone, I rode down the trail remembering other incidents that had happened along this 3 mile stretch of trail in other times.

A buckskin log reminded me of an experience Harold Arnold once had on his way to the spring for water. Being hot and tired, Harold had leaned his heavy pack against the log while he rested. Just as the pack touched the log, a yearling bear took off from the other side. Harold was so startled, all he did

was watch as the bear thundered through the huckleberry brush at full speed and didn't slow up until he was about sixty feet up a white fir. Then there was another time when two boys from Arkansas were walking the trail and suddenly found themselves between an old mother bear and her two cubs. Nobody got hurt because there wasn't a bear alive who could have caught either of those boys.

Back at Lodgepole, I took care of the stock and ate supper; and had left all the things from Bessie Rock on the truck. After supper, I loaded all the pack saddles and everything else except my saddle on the truck and hauled it to Butte Falls Ranger Station where there was a mouse-proof room for storage through the winter. My next trip would be to haul the stock to Bowen Creek where they wintered.

Before they gave me the truck, it was a twenty-six mile ride across country to take the horses and mules to winter pasture. I was going to miss that drag. Along the route, the trail wound through tall timber, so tall it hardly let in any sunlight at all. There was a lot of underbrush and some openings full of young trees. The fall colors were beautiful this time of year. The old route took me across Merle Burn,down the Cur Creek Road to Misfit Creek where I usually ate my lunch, since this was about the halfway point. After lunch, I crossed Twincheria Creek and passed west of Big Butte Springs, the source of Medford's water supply. The rest of the trip was across pine covered flats. I would miss that trip this year.

CHAPTER 29

FALSE ALARM

The winter months gave me an opportunity to learn other things beyond my regular job, things that would help me to move up higher in grade and pay. I cruised timber, helped set up timber sales and worked with the engineers on road lay-out. When the weather was very bad, I learned right-of-way drafting in the office.

My timber cruiser buddy, Chuck Hayes, and I were always betting on who would be sent to the first fire in the spring. I bet him a tall milk shake I would be the first one out. In the middle of May, a bad storm came across the Cascades and there were a lot of lightning strikes. I was on the west side of Mount McLoughlin that day, laying out a timber sale with Bob Foster. We watched the progress of the storm. Chuck was marking timber in another part of the District and the lightning ran him out of the woods, and he went back to the station. When he arrived at the office, Doug was looking for a foreman to take a crew out on a fire near the old Goss Ranch southwest of Rustler Peak. When I got in that night, Doug sent me and Gene Fonteno up to give Chuck a hand. He and I had a good laugh over that, and still do. I paid off the bet.

The first fire seemed to trigger a lot of other activity. Telephone maintenance, trail work, road maintenance, etc. Fire school was always the third week in June. Just before that, the horses and mules were rounded up and new shoes were nailed on them. They had been barefoot all winter, their shoes having been removed as soon as they reached their winter pasture. There were so many small jobs to get out of the way before the first of July.

Fire school was always a big event on the forest. There were about a hundred and twenty men at Camp Two, an old CCC camp. I was now qualified as an instructor, and taught the men in smoke-chasing and small fire suppression. There were other classes where I taught fire behavior, use of hand tools, use of water in fighting forest fires and map reading. This meant long hours preparing lesson plans.

Fire school was over on the 24th of June, and Doug and I headed for Butte Falls and home. At the door, I was met by Don followed closely by Tricia, Janna and Leslie. My wife was in the background, outlined by the houselights. For the next hour there was a steady conversation. The number one question was, "When do we move to Lodgepole?" I told them we would load up and head out the next day and that by this time tomorrow night, we would be eating supper at Lodgepole House.

Moving meant a lot of lifting and carrying boxes of dishes, food, clothes, and other articles including a gasoline engine washing machine. My wife and kids drove ahead and I followed with the truck loaded down with almost everything we owned. It took an hour of driving to get there before the truck rattled across the cattleguard and there it was, our summer home, Lodgepole

Guard Station.

As usual, the first thing the kids did was to climb out of the car and head for the creek. They dashed about from one exciting thing to another. They picked wild strawberries in the front yard and looked for the play houses and forts they had built the year before in a lodgepole thicket nearby. We worked hard to get settled in before dark. It was a real pleasure to eat our evening meal in the kitchen. We could watch out the window and see our horses and mules in the corral and the outline of Rustler Peak Lookout southeast of us.

As always, my first trip up the trail with my Government mules would be to take the Devil's Peak Lookout up to his station and get him settled. My wife's brother, Bob Greer, had the job this year and he was really looking forward to seeing his new home. Bob expected to stay on Devil's Peak all summer and wouldn't leave the place until fall.

On the fifth of July, we were up and rolling before daylight. I caught Tom and Dillon along with Molly and Smokey; and at daylight, saddled up the stock and waited for Bob and Doug to drive up from Butte Falls. Bob would stop by for awhile before he went to the trailhead to walk the nine miles in to his lookout. Doug would, no doubt, ride in with me.

It didn't make any difference how early Doug told me he would arrive at Lodgepole, it would always be around 9:00 o'clock before he got there. Sure enough, at 9:15 he rattled across the cattleguard with a pickup full of supplies which would be packed to Devil's Peak for Bob. He had his own car and would park it at the trailhead so there would be transportation when he walked out on his days off. I forget now why Doug was so late; but anyhow, he told Bob to take off and head up the trail and that we would catch him before noon.

While I loaded the stock into the truck, Doug made a last phone call to get the weather report. A 60% chance of lightning was predicted for the afternoon. That was enough for Doug to postpone the trip. We would have to stay home and be on standby in case we got a fire out of the storm. It also meant that I would have to run down Bob and have him wait with me. There were no supplies at the lookout for him to survive on, and wouldn't be until I could get there with the pack string.

When Doug told me we weren't going to make the trip, I headed for the barn to get Molly to overtake Bob. Doug hollered at me and said to forget the horse and to take the pickup and drive to the trailhead and run him down on foot. Bob wasn't too fast on his feet, but he could cover a lot of ground at a steady pace. Much to my disgust, I took off like Doug suggested. For the next two hours I ran, walked and trudged along hoping any minute to see Bob around the next bend in the trail, and took two shortcuts, but each time returned to the Seven Lakes Basin Trail to see Bob's footprints. I was really disgusted and felt like quitting the job and everything. Finally on a straight-away there was Bob up past the 4-Mile sign. He was quite surprised to see me there on foot.

Briefly, I filled him in on what had happened. Being a new employee, he didn't say too much about the change in plans. I sat on a big rock by the trail sign and Bob stretched out on the ground. We rested, while I grumbled for over an hour before we lit out for home. It was after noon when we drove into Lodgepole. I wouldn't talk to Doug because I was so mad and disgusted about

having to walk for 8 Forest Service miles. I could have ridden my horse and been less tired and more able to chase smoke, if a fire started. Doug tried every way he could think of to apologize, but he was wasting his time. I couldn't have cared less. To this day I'm glad he never said anything about why it took me so long to get back.

As for the 60% chance of lightning, it turned out there wasn't much to worry about. There was a storm that passed over and a few strikes, but there were no fires. The next morning Bob headed up the trail toward his summer home again, and I wasn't too far behind with his food and supplies. He was way ahead of me when we reached the snow drifts above Frog Lake. Dillon fell and rolled downhill about forty feet. He landed on his back and had trouble getting to his feet. When he got his wind and came up to the trail, I was busy with Smokey trying to get her off a log. Her front feet fell through on one side and her hind feet on the other. She was high centered. I stood close to her head and talked to her. All my horses and mules would respond to my voice and usually calm down, no matter what kind of a fix they were in.

I had started to take off her pack by cutting the lash ropes when she made one last effort. Her right hind foot caught on a limb sticking out from the side of the log and she lunged forward. The heavy load threw her off balance and she rolled over a complete turn and landed right side up. After a short rest, she got to her feet, apparently unhurt.

It is only about five miles from Frog Lake to Devil's Peak, but it took over six hours to cover the distance. About five minutes after Smokey high-centered, Tom went down and rolled over two times coming to a rest on his back just above a clump of trees. Flying, rolling chunks of snow had hardly settled when my saddle horse fell through the rotten snow and started a backward somersault.

A man who has spent a good part of his life in the saddle reacts automatically to just such situations. My boots were out of the stirrups, and I dove from the saddle. It seemed like it was five minutes before my body crunched into the snow.

My horse and I came to a halt within a few feet of each other just below where Tom mule was. There must have been twenty pounds of snow packed into my boots, up my pant legs and down my shirt collar. You can believe it or not, but my hat never came off, mostly because I held it on with one hand. In the excitement, old Tom floundered around some and turned right side up by the trees below him. None of us were hurt.

It took some doing to get us out of the fix we were in. Without a doubt, it was one of the toughest pack trips I ever made. All my horses and mules lost a lot of weight on the eighteen hour drag. I weighed almost seven pounds less than when we started out.

At the lookout, Bob and I put the shutters up and swept the place out, and of course pulled the loads off the mules and horses first and loosened the cinches. Bob looked the country over while we ate our lunches. He fell in love with his new environment. I helped him get used to the fire finder and told him a few things about the country, and then got ready to leave. The stock seemed uneasy as I cinched them up again, and Tom was a little stiffened up. We had a lot of trouble going down over the rotten snow, and it took us three hours

to reach Frog Lake. It was a great relief to travel again on solid ground.

After a day like this behind us, we always rested up for a day before we made another drag. The horses and mules that made the trip with me were still eating from the mangers in the barn and the barnyard feed rack when I went to check on them the next morning. They were so tired after the hard trip they hardly touched their oats the night we got in. Sometime during the night after they had rested up, all the horses and mules started eating. That was why there was so much feed left the next morning. When they had finished their oats, I bathed their backs and under their bellies where the cinches were pulled so tight. The strong salt water helped toughen their hides and healed up any sore spots. Dillon got so fond of the treatment, he would meet me at the yard gate when he saw me coming with a five gallon bucket in my hand. He would turn sideways so I could start right in on him.

The day was almost done when, after taking care of my horses and mules and patching pack rigging, my family and I made a trip to Butte Falls. We ate at our home there and picked up supplies for Bessie Rock Lookout before we returned to Lodgepole. Harold Arnold would be on Bessie Rock this summer again. He was a local man who lived in Butte Falls and was an expert mechanic on anything from an old drag saw to a truck motor, although two cycle motors were his specialty. He was dependable when he worked alone and trustworthy. We could depend on Harold for doing an exceptional job on the lookout.

Harold was a tall slim man and good wholesome food meant a lot to him. He could put away more grub at one sitting than most any man I ever met. He kept a constant replenishment coming to him about every two weeks on the backs of Tom and Dillon. That fall, there was almost a two mule load of food to pack back home. He even wore out the old kerosene stove, and Dillon had to tote him in a new one that summer.

Bessie Rock Ladder

Bessie Rock was one of the most interesting lookouts on the forest. The house sat on a rock pinnacle, jutting straight up from a ridge-top. It was 110 feet from the ground to the floor of the lookout house. There were ninety-six feet of ladder with the longest single span of fifty-six feet. The ladder was 2-1/2 feet wide and the steps were made from 2 x 6 lumber. Down the center of the ladder I installed a pipe which had a notch every six inches the entire length. There were two safety belts available if two people climbed the ladder at once. A heavy duty snap on the belt was fastened to a device on the pipe which slid up as you climbed the ladder. If the climber should slip and fall, the safety device would catch on one of the notches and hold him back from falling.

The safety pipe, as we called it, came in ten-foot sections and was made of heavy galvanized one-inch tubing. The metal was thicker than regular water pipe and smoother. Tom had the honor of packing the thing from Imnaha, together with a lot of brackets and braces that went with it. The day I put it up the center of the ladder, was a very long day. I tied myself to the steps with a lineman's safety belt like the ones telephone maintenance crews use. Then I took several pieces of nylon cord and tied wrenches to my belt. I was mighty glad to get to the top and done with the job. For me, it would be impossible to get used to working at such dizzy heights.

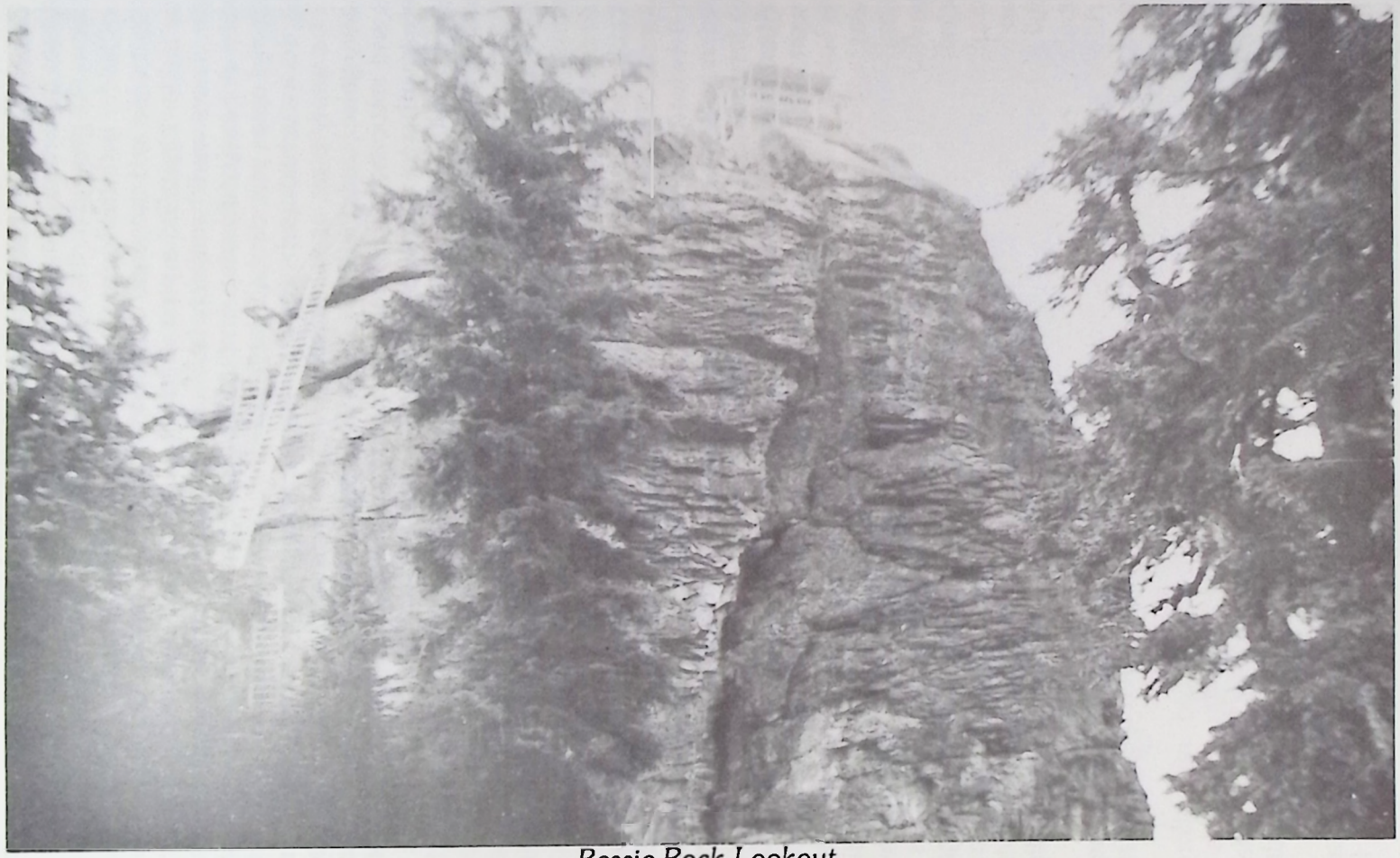
At the lookout, Harold and I got all his supplies to the top of the rock using the cable-car and winch. Later on in the season, I would pack in the new cookstove. The old one was going haywire, and Harold would have trouble with it before long because he sure liked to cook and eat. With everything settled in at the lookout, I told Harold goodbye and fastened my safety belt in place for the descent down the ladder.

About halfway down the 96 foot, gray painted ladder, I paused to look at the wonderful view and take notice at the buzz of activity beneath me on the rocks below. A fuzzy-tailed wood rat was busy carrying sticks to a small ledge. He was building a new nest in a well sheltered notch at Bessie Rock's base. Blue jays and camp robbers were arguing over some bread scraps we had tossed down from the top of the rock during our lunch. There were several conies or rock rabbits calling to each other with their high pitched voices. A man gets so wrapped up in his work and just too busy to stop and take notice to the world around him at times. I found out it really added to the enjoyment of daily living to pull up, look and listen at times, and just take a look at what I was riding through.

All the way back to Lodgepole, I rode along enjoying life immensely. There were always a few unexpected things on every trip, but often they were not really anything to write about.

It made no difference how rough a day I had experienced, my children always greeted me with the same enthusiasm. Generally they wanted me to give them a hand with some project like repairing a bicycle or building a dam in the creek. I was never too tired to play with them. It just seemed like I couldn't be with them enough.

About 8:00 that evening, Doug called and told me he would like to have me make a pack trip the next day. It turned out to be something different for a change and my schedule would be all fouled up.



Bessie Rock Lookout

Chapter 30

A HORSE CALLED DUKE AND FISHERMAN'S LUCK

The Union Creek District, our neighbor to the north, had a road survey job to accomplish. Several men with their supplies and equipment would have to be packed in to a remote area. A base camp would be set up, generally by a spring or near a running creek. I would take three pack animals and one saddle horse to the Union Creek Ranger Station. The District Engineer, Morris Roslaw, would meet me there with the stuff to be packed, and guide me to where he wanted it taken.

Morris was a very aggressive man. He liked to see things move along fast and efficiently and was quite surprised to see me walk into the Union Creek office at ten minutes to 8:00 a.m.

Juanita Larson spoke to me when I walked through the door. She was a combination receptionist and general all-around office manager. It was her job to keep government spending on that district under control. Her many other duties included hiring manpower and typing termination papers. Juanita greeted me with a pleasant smile and introduced herself. Evidently Doug had called ahead and told her of my visit. I was just a little shy and some surprised to see such a friendly young woman here, and near forgot what my reason for being there was about.

Old Union Creek Office, R.R.N.F.

Morris broke the spell by telling me he was ready to head out. His pickup was parked out front, loaded down with supplies to be packed into the Engineer's Camp on Flat Creek. I bid farewell to Juanita, climbed into my truck and proceeded to follow Morris up the highway with my horses and mules.

We swung left from Highway 62 onto Highway 230 and traveled about two more miles. Here we entered a dirt road and crossed a steel bridge which goes over the North Fork of Rogue River. About three miles of steep, crooked mountain road later, we reached the Flat Creek Trailhead. Morris showed me the approximate location on a crumpled map where he would set up a camp. It was at least a six mile drag from where we were.

As we unloaded the pickup, he explained to me about the project and why there were so many odd things to pack in. Among the articles were several hundred road stakes. They were cut from planed lumber and each stake was about two feet long. They were one inch thick and two inches wide with one end tapered to a sharp point. Some were in bundles of twenty-five each and others were loose. The smooth surface made them slick and they would be hard to hold in place.

There were two, three-burner gas stoves with fuel for each and enough food for seven men. Morris said the men would pack in their own sleeping bags when they walked in about noon that day. One large box was labeled "bread" and contained twenty loaves. There was a large amount of peanut butter and jam too.

Tom and Dillon nearly always went with me on strange trips like this because I knew that no matter what happened, I could always count on them. If I got lost, Dillon could generally lead me out to a trail or a road. For this trip, I decided to use Union Creek's only saddle horse which I could leave at their barn after the trip. Lowell Ash used this big white horse during the summer season in his fire control work.

The big horse's name was Duke. Doug had told me that Duke would kill a man if ever he got the chance. I didn't believe the horse had a mean bone in his body. He was just ornery. We were soon packed, and I climbed up on Molly and headed up the trail. Tom and Dillon were carrying about two hundred pounds each. I had put all the road stakes on Duke. His load wasn't heavy, but boy, was it hard to hold. Duke weighed about 1300 pounds; and being such a big horse, it made his pack look high and wide.

The trail hadn't been maintained for two years and there were a few small trees across it. The blazes were easy to spot as I rode along. Duke followed just like he had packed many a load. There was always slack in his lead rope and he never bumped his pack against trees near the trail. I was beginning to like Duke real well.

The Flat Creek Trail went through tall timber. There were Douglas fir trees that looked like they would measure seven or eight feet in diameter, lots of White fir, White pine and huge Sugar pine. It always was a lot more fun to ride through the forest on a good horse than it was to walk. I could look up at the tree tops and not have to worry about stumbling over something.

The trail wound its way past rock ledges and in and out of small sharp ravines. At the approach of a little rocky ravine, we had to move out of the trail slightly to get around the end of a large tree, up-rooted by the wind. Tom and

Dillon were back in the trail when Duke fell. I looked back, and all that was in sight was the side of his pack and loose survey stakes all over the place. Duke had cut the corner too close, the bank gave way and he plunged sideways into the deep hole where the tree had once stood. He appeared to be helpless.

I took his lead rope loose from Tom, led the mules to one side, tied them up and was about to cut the lash rope when Duke started to flounder around. He got to his feet while still in the hole. He stood there a moment then with all his strength, he thundered out of the trap and headed toward the mules. His pack had slipped so the bags were under his belly. He just stood there and never moved a muscle. The big white horse had a chance to get me when he come up out of the hole, but he didn't try.

Duke stopped at the head of a steep little ravine where the trail was only a shelf above a rocky washed-out place full of dead brush. I couldn't lead him to a better place on around the hillside because his pack had him fouled. The road stakes were poking him in the belly.

I approached him on the upper side and started to loosen the lash rope. The bags fell off and rattled down through the rocks. I lost my footing and slid under Duke's belly right on past one of the pack bags. The dust really flew. Then I couldn't climb out of the sharp-sided ravine because of heavy brush and steep cliff-like banks. The only way out was the way I had come down. Duke watched every move I made. I talked to him and worked my way back under the big horse and climbed out on the other side. He never moved a muscle. From that day, Duke was another one of my much loved Government horses. He was not a killer.

Back on my feet, I led Duke to flatter ground; and after much effort, retrieved the road stakes, repacked him and got under way. Morris was waiting for me, rather impatiently, because it was after lunch time and his lunch was in my saddle bags.

We took off all the packs first,and Morris examined everything. He was surprised to see that there were no broken eggs or flat loaves of bread. Everything was in good shape. While the horses and mules grazed in a meadow nearby, Morris and I walked over to Flat Creek and enjoyed our lunches. We watched ten and twelve-inch mountain trout jump to the water's surface as we tossed in bread crumbs. This looked like a good spot for the engineers' base camp while they surveyed the Flat Creek Road.

This pack trip taught me a lot about Duke. He rode in my truck like a dog. He didn't cause any trouble or give me a bad time when he was in trouble. I wished Lowell would let me use him all summer.

Living on a guard station is a most fascinating job. True, it is hectic at times, but the excitement and surprises that happen between times take the edge off the hard part. There was one instance which happened during the first week in August one summer. A newly-wed couple drifted in from California to spend a few days at the Upper South Fork Campground. They arrived in the early afternoon and were tired and sleepy after their long drive. They parked their pickup camper and ate a late lunch.

The young man, whose name was Jim, looked at a forest map he had picked up at the Ranger Station and decided it was only about 3 1/2 miles from camp to Blue Canyon. He told his wife to take a nap while he took his fishing

pole and went to one of the lakes in Blue Canyon. He would bring back a nice mess of mountain trout for their supper. It sounded like a wonderful plan.

He kissed his bride goodbye and headed up the trail. Jim was a big man, around six feet four inches tall and weighed over two hundred pounds. He had been active in sports and was in excellent physical shape. I suppose he ran up the trail most of the way. However, he had miscalculated the distance on the map. It was over six miles to Blue Canyon instead of three. He realized this only after he had passed the five mile sign, but the sun was bright and he kept going until finally he reached Blue Lake. He fished there for awhile and caught three eastern brook trout, each over a foot long.

Then he walked over to Meadow Lake nearby. The fish were biting so good, he caught his limit in a short time. Jim was so happy and was enjoying life so much that he didn't notice the sun had dropped over the hill until the shadow of Blue Rock covered the lake. Then he took his fishing pole apart, gathered up his catch of trout and headed downhill.

He ran the first mile until it got dark and had trouble finding the trail. When the sun goes down, it gets dark fast, especially in country where the timber is tall and the mountains are high. The huckleberry brush grew about two feet tall and spread over the trail in places. It's hard to keep it cut back, because the trail isn't used very much. Right after Jim passed the five mile sign on his return trip, it got so dark he could hardly see a thing. He lost the trail and couldn't find his way through the boggy places, over the rocks and the downed trees.

After fighting his way, and falling down many times, he decided to follow close to the river. But the going here was impossible. His only chance seemed to be to spend the night there, or get in the river and follow the cold mountain stream to the bridge near his camp. It was more than four miles away.

By now, Jim's wife was at her wits end. She woke up just before dark and saw that Jim wasn't back yet. She put on the coffee pot and planned a meal to go with the fish Jim would bring back with him. An hour passed and she was sure something had happened to her husband. Another camper happened to come along, planning to stay for the night. She told them the story, and they drove to Butte Falls Ranger Station to let us know.

At the Ranger Station, Truman Puchbauer and I collected radios, some first aid equipment, three warm blankets and a stretcher. While I put four flashlights together, Truman called in another man and we all headed for Upper South Fork Campground. It was then 10:00 o'clock at night. The young bride was so worried and frightened she hardly knew what to tell us. Chuck Hayes and Truman took a radio, the stretcher and other equipment and started up the trail. I stayed with the mobile unit for communication.

As they went up the trail, Truman and Chuck stopped and hollered for Jim quite often, but there was no answer. They went beyond the two-mile sign and still no sign of Jim. At the mobile unit, I stayed close to the radio. Jim's wife wouldn't stay in the pickup where it was warm. She was afraid that bad news would be broadcast, and she couldn't stand the thought of hearing it first-hand. She sat in the camper with a heavy coat around her shoulders. It gets quite cold in that country at night.

About 11:30, I saw a movement near the rivers edge. At first I thought it was an animal of some sort and turned my flashlight toward it; and there, in

the beam of the light, was the most water-soaked man I ever saw. Jim was safe, but not too sound. I hollered and Jim's wife came running. She cried and cried as Jim held her close to his wet body. I went back to the radio and called Truman and Chuck to let them know Jim was safe and then built up the campfire so he could get thawed out.

Soon the boys were back, and Jim was telling us the story of his ordeal. He had decided to follow the river because it was bound to lead him to the bridge sometime during the night. He had lost his fish and fishing pole. The water was so deep in places that he had to swim hard to keep up with the current. One time he fell and went underwater for several feet. Apparently he fell over a water fall. He also lost his shirt and hunting knife. His hat was gone and his pants were torn. He wore a light tee-shirt, blue jeans and tennis shoes.

Truman gave him first aid for several bad scratches and one small cut on his forearm. Jim was lucky to be alive. If he hadn't been a strong man, I doubt he could ever have come down the river like he did. This is just one account of a search and rescue we helped take part in during my stay on the Butte Falls District.

CHAPTER 31

FIRE AT KING SPRUCE

AND THE LEMON MERINGUE PIE

There is never a dull moment around a fire guard station. The lightning risk is generally high, and many times I would have to stick around after hours. A storm would usually hit in the afternoon. Sometimes it would let up before dark and other times lightning would hammer down all night long and into the next day.

On a hot summer day in late July, lightning was predicted. Early in the day thunder heads were building high enough for us to see them from Lodgepole, which is situated in rather flat country, surrounded by high mountains and tall timber. Thunder heads had to be quite high before we could see them. Many times we heard thunder before we saw the clouds.

Rustler Peak heard the first clap of thunder soon after lunch. It wasn't long before the sky was black and the fire-works were on. The storm lasted about two hours. Rustler Peak picked up a smoke on the ridge above King Spruce. Doug called for help from the smoke-jumpers who were stationed at Cave Junction. In twenty minutes Rustler Peak reported four parachutes billowing out above the fire. They might have it under control by dark.

Doug sent in a ground force on foot as a follow-up crew. There were four men fully equipped to fight fire. The eight of them fought fire most of the night and toward daylight they got the blaze under control. There were many rotten logs, brush and stumps that gave the fire-fighters a bad time. They had to be careful and watch for burning debris falling down from the tree tops. Doug wouldn't let me go on the initial attack. He wanted me to take in more supplies the next day if necessary and pack the smoke-jumpers equipment out.

I hit the trail at daylight with four pack animals. Smokey was my saddle horse. The air was cool and things looked so pretty and green after the storm. Sunlight filtered down through the tall timber and exposed young trees standing in small openings. Their symmetrical shapes were emphasized by the sunlight shining on the clinging dew drops and causing them to sparkle. Small animals and birds were everywhere, flying and scampering about. Tom and Dillon spooked at every little movement. I rode straight to the fire after I left the trail. Eight men were still pecking away. They were tired and black with dirt and ashes.

Dillon carried refreshments for the weary men. There was cold fruit and tomato juice for everyone. That nearly always hit the spot with fire-fighters. The fire had burned about an acre. The four smoke-jumpers had all their jump gear in a pile near the trail. After a short rest, I loaded everything that was supposed to go onto the mules. Tools for two men would be left at the fire until

I rode in and made sure it was dead out. We always checked a fire after 24 hours. The final check would be 48 hours after the last spark was out.

The eight fire-fighters left about an hour before I did. It was better this way because If I had a run-away, no one would be in front of the running mules and horses. The trail had been used a lot by cattle and was dusty. Animal tracks were thick. There were a lot of deer and bear and a few elk in this country. Not far from the fire a bear had stepped out of the timber into the trail and followed the men. Bear tracks blotted out the man tracks. I couldn't resist getting down to measure them. They were 11 1/2 inches long. The bear had gone down the trail for two miles before heading up through the rocks above King Spruce Canyon.

After the smoke-jumpers had landed at the fire, a plane had dropped tools, food and water in five gallon cans. Cargo parachutes, smaller than jump chutes, are made of white silk and measure about thirteen feet across when open. Sometimes torn chutes are used to insure a safer landing for cargo. I had filled all pack bags and boxes and had to put several of the silk chutes on top of Tom, hoping the load wouldn't shift. An empty wooden box was placed on the chutes and the entire load topped with a pack cover. I tied the load down and pulled the rope tight.

Soon after the bear tracks showed up, Tom's load started to slip. I straightened him up and we continued on down the trail. The load shifted to the other side and again, I repacked Tom and tried to put the chutes where they wouldn't cause trouble. He seldom let me out of his sight.

Tom's load was a difficult one to hold straight. For the third time I got down to straighten his load. While sizing up things, I noticed a small log laying nearby. It had been cut from a mountain hemlock which had fallen across the trail. The log was three feet long and about six inches in diameter. I took a rope from my saddle bags and tied the log on the light side of Tom's pack. It helped to hold it from slipping farther; and for the next mile, Tom's load held steady. He spent a lot of time eating huckleberry brush and the grass that Dillon didn't get as he went from one side of the trail to the other.

I settled down to the peaceful enjoyment of riding Smokey. It was amusing to me the different gaits she had. One rider said she was like riding a pogo stick. That was surely true; but about a year after we got Smokey, I discovered that by using spurs a little, she had another gait that would cover at least 6 1/2 miles an hour. With her long steps and swinging walk she smoothed out and would hold that speed for miles, uphill and down. She would over-reach with her hind feet more than two feet and fill my boots with small rocks and dirt.

As Smokey swung along down the trail, there was a little commotion behind me. Looking back, I saw Tom coming down the trail. The small log that was tied on for ballast was bouncing along behind him, still attached to one end of the rope it was anchored to. Tom picked up speed. The faster he ran, the more he lost from his pack. I saw the pack cover fly up into the air and start flopping up and down behind him. The wooden box fell off and bounced downhill over the rocks. The silk parachutes fell off one at a time and strung out down the trail. For a quarter of a mile back up the trail there was lash rope, C rations, shovels, pulaskis and other things scattered as Tom had picked up speed. The pack cover was flopping against his heels continually.

Smokey almost fell apart; she wouldn't move out of the trail no matter how I coaxed. She jumped up and down and tried to get going. The ground gave way at the edge of the trail and she fell into a deep hole, where the trail crew had blasted out a large tree stump. Tom went thundering by, made a left turn up through the trees above me and stopped. Smokey calmed down and jumped out of the hole. Dillon saw Tom coming down the trail. I sometimes wonder what goes through a mule's mind when he suddenly gets scared. All that could be seen was a cloud of dust where he took off. The two pack horses panicked, but soon stopped and started to graze.

I tied Smokey to a tree and she immediately started to consume every green thing within reach. Poor Tom was shaking; his eyes were big and his ears pointed straight up as he turned toward me. Sweat was pouring off his body. I took off his pack and led him to an opening between the trees to look him over, then rubbed him down with an empty gunny sack and he relaxed and started eating.

With Tom calmed down, I went back up the trail to gather up the pieces. The wooden box was the last article. Where the wooden box had fallen off, I noticed a big slab of bark laying across the trail. I knew it hadn't been there when I rode by and went up to see what happened. As Tom was searching for every blade of grass along the way, he saw a luscious clump behind a jagged snag near the trail. It was about fourteen feet tall - a big Douglas fir snapped off by a high wind. The thick bark was loose. As Tom reached around behind the snag to get a mouthful of grass, the little log tied to his pack caught on the loose slab of bark. When Tom stepped back, the bark pulled loose and fell. He reared and stampeded.

Every pack trip I made was different. No two were ever alike, and I enjoyed it much. Every bit of trouble that was rough and dangerous while it was happening, was so much pleasure to think about when the dust finally settled. The worst thing that ever happened to any of my mules was a skinned shin bone now and then.

The last five miles of that trip went well. Doug had called earlier and told my wife the next trip would be to Hemlock Lake. The trail crew out there needed food. I took care of the stock and then headed for Butte Falls to pick up my cargo.

Doug had left complete instructions with my wife as to where the boxes of food would be and who to check with to get it. Doug was active in civic affairs and wouldn't be available, though he had three large boxes of food all packed up and ready to go. The boxes were sitting on the counter at the General Store. If I couldn't get to town before the store closed, I was to interrupt a City Council meeting where Mr. Pingle, the store-keeper, would be. He would take leave and open up so I could get the food. That sounded simple enough.

When Bea, the kids and I drove into Butte Falls, it was past closing time so I parked in front of the City Hall, then walked in and sat down quietly as the meeting was still in progress. The City Fathers seemed to be having some kind of problem. One of their members resigned and no one was willing to fill his shoes. Mr. Abbot looked up from his cluttered desk and got a bright look on his face when he saw me. He pointed and said rather loudly, "There is our man sitting back there!"

In less than fifteen minutes, I was packing the groceries out to my car with my head still whirling. During that time, I was sworn in as a member of the City Council of Butte Falls and put at the head of the Sanitation Department, whatever that was. Must have done okay because I was voted in for the following two years for the same office.

Early the next morning I saddled up and headed out for the trailhead. The trail crew was right behind me as I pulled up at Big Ben Creek on the Parker Meadows Road. There were seven men in this crew - a good bunch to be around. I knew all of them well; we had worked together during the off season, planting trees, burning logging slash and a lot of other project jobs. Everyone was in an especially good mood. They watched as I separated their belongings and put them in three different piles for three mule-loads. Two animals were packed, and Dillon was waiting his turn.

Ted Fredenberg was the trail crew foreman. He was an aggressive man with a wonderful sense of humor. A good joke was like a tonic to him. He was a high quality man for the foreman job, and the morale in his crew was always high. Ted reminded one of his men not to forget the box that was still in their rig. Darwin Moore had already got it and was walking toward me with a big grin on his face. The other men watched as I opened the box to see what it was so I would know how to pack it on Dillon. If it was a boxful of shirts and socks it could go most anywhere; but if it was something fragile, it couldn't.

The look on my face must have expressed shock. The men had a good laugh over that. Now, it was up to me. I considered myself an expert packer by this time and had bragged to the men one time that I had packed almost everything but a lemon meringue pie. When I had opened the box, there before my eyes was the most beautiful lemon meringue pie a man ever saw. It was big, at least twelve inches across and maybe two inches thick. The crew wished me luck and started out on foot up the trail. As an after-thought, Ted hollered back that they expected to have pie for lunch at their camp eight miles up the trail.

It took me about twenty minutes to make a special cardboard box to put my prize cargo in. This was one pack trip that had to come off without any mishaps. The odds were against me because of unexpected yellow jacket nests and numerous other things that could cause a king-sized run-away and turn the pie into one big mess under the pack cover. I shuddered to think about the worst and visualized poor Dillon covered with the remains of the lemon meringue pie. If we made it, I surely intended to get a large chunk of the beautiful masterpiece and give the mule at least half of it.

Dillon was the chosen one. He was sure-footed and carried his load even and steady like a burro, even at a dead run. It was his starting and stopping that could louse things up.

The pack saddle was what we call a decker. An extra pad made a nice cushion to set the pie on. A top pack on top of each pack box worked out just right to hold the pie-box from moving around. My own special hitch would hold that load in place like no load had ever been held, and this time I would lead Dillon every step of the way as Molly carried me along.

The men had been in camp at least an hour before me and my mules arrived and were sitting around resting. Everyone got to their feet when we pulled up. I got down, tied the horse and mules to trees close by.

Seven men formed a half circle around me and Dillon, making friendly remarks as the load was unlashed. No one offered to help because they knew what I would say. It did me good to take plenty of time to fold up the pack cover and do up my lash rope before the prize was unveiled. The top pack was pulled off exposing the pie-box exactly as it was packed. The men were getting impatient with my slow motions.

Gently I lifted the box from Dillon's back. He eyed me with suspicion. At a make-shift table, my sharp knife cut the strings that held the box together. Down inside was another box that contained the pie. A quick look assured me the pie was in perfect condition. It took me only half a minute to carve out a large wedge-shaped chunk and bite off the pointed end. The meringue wasn't even cracked. I shared the remainder of the chunk of pie with Dillon.

At the time of this writing, Darwin Moore still recalls this true happening and tells the story during lunch hour or coffee break at the Butte Falls Ranger Station.

There was a brief moment of silence and then everyone seemed to talk at once. Darwin said he didn't doubt for a moment that it could be done, but they just had to see what would happen.

The lemon pie wasn't the only goodie to come in this trip. Tom had carried a huge watermelon and six cantaloupes. Along with the pie, Dillon had packed a forty pound crate of peaches and several pounds of fresh tomatoes. I had taken time to pack those the night before. To say the least, we all enjoyed eating the pie along with our lunches, and Dillon enjoyed a small chunk too.

Hemlock Lake is beautiful, and I envied the crew their opportunity to live and work in such a spot. Though it is so lovely, very few people ever go there. I was reluctant to leave, but it was eight miles back to trailhead, so I said goodbye and headed back for civilization.

CHAPTER 32

BEAR TROUBLE AT TRAIL CAMP

When I hired out for the job as a mule skinner and smokechaser, I did not realize that being a packer was such a hard job. Like most people, I thought that all the job entailed was to ride a good horse and lead pack horses and mules up a well-marked trail. Looking back on it now, I wonder who I thought would put those packs on the animals. Who would repack the mules along the trail when they bucked off their loads. After I learned how to load a mule right, I always looked forward to packing unusual items.

One year Doug had a little money to spare, so he bought two new apartment-size gas cook stoves and heaters for Devil's Peak and Bessie Rock Lookouts. I hauled the stoves to Lodgepole and left them there until I had time to pack them in. One Wednesday evening Doug called to ask what my schedule was for the following day. He wanted me to take a cook stove and heater to Devil's Peak. I would need help to load the stove. About fifty feet of copper tubing, two tanks of propane, flanging tools, etc. would go. He told me he had all the parts and pieces laid out and ready.

The next morning I met Doug at the Seven Lakes Trailhead on Parker Meadows Road at around 0800. I had fixed a special carrier to hold the stove up until I got it lashed down and was anxious to see if it would work. Doug wanted me to put the stove on top of the mule, but I preferred making a side pack with it and off set the weight of the stove with rocks. Doug had long since given up trying to get me to do things his way, so he helped me set the stove up on Dillon's side and watched as I put two large rocks in a pack bag on the other side. I lashed the load down and led Dillon around to see how it balanced. It looked about right. The load weighed about 160 pounds. Tom carried two ten-gallon propane tanks and the light Dearborn heating stove. Smokey lucked out and had only about a hundred pounds of food and other small articles.

When the Forest Service first constructed lookout houses, they equipped them with good heating stoves and low pot-bellied wood cook-stoves. As time marched on, someone got the idea of replacing the cast iron stove with a neat little three-burner kerosene contraption that sat on a long narrow stand. It took up a lot less room and the lookout could spend more time looking the countryside over for forest fires and a lot less time cutting and packing in a big wood supply every morning.

This was the beginning of more trouble than you could shake a stick at. About the same time, a white gas Coleman lantern replaced the old kerosene lamps. The Coleman lantern added considerably to the lookout's late evening hours by casting light into dark corners which had never been done before. The old kerosene light didn't have near the candlepower as the two burner Coleman.

But there was many a time when a lookout didn't pay much attention to

the label on the fuel cans. He would switch the fuel around, and the fun began. First he would practically overhaul the lantern to try to make it burn on kerosene. After an hour or so, he would give up and dig out the old kerosene lamp, which luckily would still have fuel in the bowl. The real shocker was how extermely well the kerosene stove lit up. Usually the lookout was lucky to get by with only singed eyebrows and a few locks of hair burned off above his forehead. Sometimes an over-excited lookout would toss his stove out the door to the rocks below and watch it explode causing a small forest fire. This also created some excitement in the fire control office at headquarters. As time went on, the Coleman lantern was replaced to a certain extent by a propane light that didn't amount to much because the small cylinders ran out of fuel too soon. The kerosene stoves were now about to be replaced again - this time by apartment-sized propane gas stoves.

We started up the trail and things went smoothly. By the time we passed through Black Bear Forest Camp, I decided to turn Dillon loose so he could go along at his own speed. A mule carries his load so much easier that way. The stove stuck out quite a ways from Dillon's side, but he knew how to work his way around the trees. He wouldn't bump anything with his load.

The stove was riding good as we went up the trail toward King Spruce. We made good time and long before noon we were headed up the switchbacks toward Devil's Peak Lookout. At the top, the first thing we unloaded was the gas cook stove. I was proud of Dillon -there wasn't a scratch on it anywhere. He had carried it just like he knew it was something to be careful with. I ate my lunch and then proceeded to install the new appliances.

I took out the old wood-burning heater and set the new one in its place. Then removed the kerosene stove and the table it sat on and set up the new cook stove. Boy, it did look nice. It took me about an hour to drill holes and install tubing. I hooked up a propane tank and turned on the gas. The next step was to take some soap and water to check for gas leaks. Where a tubing joint wasn't tight, bubbles would appear. I told the lookout never to check for gas leaks with a liqhted match! When everything was working good, I broke in the new stove by boiling up a pot of coffee. A few instructions on how to replace tanks and light the pilot light, and I said goodbye to the boy and headed for home.

When I got back home, I called Doug. He was amused to hear how well Dillon had carried the stove to Devil's Peak. After the conversation concerning my trip, Doug told me about a little problem the trail crew was having with a bear. It seemed that the bear had raided their camp while they were at work and had ruined most of their food supply. We must figure out some way to protect their food from bears. I told Doug that I had an idea how it might be done if he would allow me to come down to the warehouse and cut up some lumber. He listened to my plan and said, "Come ahead and proceed with the idea."

The next morning I went down to Butte Falls and cut out the parts for a box, four feet long and two feet wide and two and a half feet deep. Doug had purchased more food for the trail crew while I built the box. That afternoon my horses and mules and I rested up. The sun was warm and all nine head were in the big corral. I took a snapshot of everyone of the lazy animals laying down

sleeping. Early the next morning I headed up the trail with lumber on Dillon and food on Tom. When we came into camp, the trail crew was out building a trail. I unloaded the stock, unsaddled them and then started to build the box. It looked good and stout when it was nailed together. Now to hang the box high and out of reach of Mr. Bear. There were two good-sized trees nearby. It looked like a good place to start.

With great effort, I climbed up one tree for more than twenty feet and attached a rope, then slid down and doctored a couple of scratched places on my shinbones. With the job half done, I had to climb the other nearby tree and anchor the other end of the rope to it. I had tied a telephone line insulator in the center of the rope, a 3/8 inch rope slid easily through it to pull the box up and let it down. Tree number two hadn't been so hard to climb; there were more limbs to step on to help me climb up and down. With cross rope in place and the hang rope run through the insulator, I was ready to try the device.

A hole was drilled through the top of each corner of the box. With two ropes about five feet long, I ran the ends through each hole and tied knots so they couldn't slip through. The finished box looked like a giant purse with handles. My idea worked good. The box was easy to pull up and down. It hung about six or eight feet from each tree and the bottom was at least fifteen feet off the ground. A bear surely wasn't smart enough to untie the rope and let down the box of food. I put all the food into the box. It was heavy for one man to pull up, but I got the job done and put a note on the stove, telling the crew what I had done, then headed for home.

But with all this, the bear didn't give up. In fact, she caused a considerable amount of damage. The crew saw her tracks in the dust of the trail, and they looked pretty big. They also noticed the tracks of her yearling cub. Late one evening the crew was resting after an especially hard days work. The evening was warm and the tent flap was open. Four men were playing cards near the back wall of the tent. One man was asleep and two others were lying on their beds resting. Don Ellis was reading a book. His bed was next to the open tent flap and his head was toward the opening. Hearing a noise near to him, he looked over the book and stared right at the broad face of momma bear. Don was very startled when he saw the bright beady eyes so close to him. His sudden movement startled the shaggy predator; she snorted loudly and ran for the shelter of the dark forest. One man jumped to his feet and bumped his head on the Coleman lantern. Don was on his feet quick as a wink.

Another man grabbed his rifle and dashed outside with a four-cell flashlight to look for the bear. He saw her red eyes shining once about a hundred yards away, but she disappeared into the night. In a few moments, things in the tent were almost back to normal, except for Don Ellis and the man who had bumped his head on the edge of the lantern. Don got a couple of the men to help him move his bed to the very back of the tent. The crew spent the rest of the evening in much discomfort; they tied the tent flap down solid. It was an awfully warm evening, but they didn't know but what the bear might come back for another look around. Don didn't get too much sleep that night. Ted Fredenburg got the first aid kit and took out a large bandaid. With it, he sealed up the inch-long cut on the bald pate of his luckless crewman.

On Friday afternoon the crew came in a couple of hours early. They put

all their groceries in the wooden box and hoisted it high between the two trees. They rolled up their beds and put them in a pile on one bedstead. Everything seemed to be secure. The crew left camp and walked seven miles to the Parker Meadows Road.

The two day weekend passed by fast as the men rested up. Monday morning they walked back to camp and found their food box broken to splinters. How the bear got it down no one ever figured out. Somehow it climbed the tree and apparently jumped out on the box. It fell to the ground, bear and all. The cross rope was still up and the hang rope was anchored to the tree. All the canned goods had been punctured by large sharp teeth. The bear went into the tents and never came out the same way. There were several large, three-cornered holes in the tent walls. She had dragged one sleeping bag a hundred yards from the tent and never tore it. The crew figured she had destroyed about $45 worth of food over the weekend.

A few nights later, the bear came back to camp again. She was getting too brave and could very easily do bodily harm to one of the men. They heard her rattling around in the cook tent. The men got flashlights and guns. Each man flashed his light in her direction. A yearling cub ran away, but the big bear stood and looked at the lights for a moment. Her eyes, shone a red color - real spooky looking. Then she too turned and ran. Charlie fired a shot and killed her. There was just no other way. She would have ruined their camp from then on. Finally she would have kept the men from coming in to camp, and maybe even hurt or killed one of them.

I turned on my radio the next evening to listen in on forest gossip and learned that the trail crew had shot the bear and were expecting me to bring it out on one of my mules. Later that evening, Doug called on the telephone and asked me to ride in and bring out the meat. When I got to camp, the crew had the bear ready to go. She was in good shape. I decided to put the animal on Dillon. He walked right up to the black carcass hanging in a tree; it didn't bother him at all. The smell of the dead bear didn't bother Tom or my saddle horse either. I often wondered why they didn't make a fuss. Maybe it was because they trusted me.

CHAPTER 33

THRILLS OF A LONG HARD RIDE

During the last few years as a full-time mule skinner, I had made many exciting trips. Even though the Forest Service furnished me with a good truck to haul the stock, I still put in just as much time packing as I did in those years when I rode right from the hitching rail at Lodgepole. The demand for my pack string was on the increase. Some years, fire would dominate the scene, and I packed to and from fires day and night for weeks on end. I was always the one who took a saddle horse with one mule and rode hundreds of miles checking fires that had been declared dead out. I don't really know how many dozen fires were started during those years. After they were pronounced dead out, I checked most every one of them two more times to make sure. The Forest Service referred to those checks as the twenty-four hour and the thirty-six hour checks.

To give you some idea of what I mean about riding hundreds of miles to check fires – we hit the trail at daylight one cool summer morning. Molly was just raring to go She would carry me over the trails day in and day out and I never saw her when she was too tired to go. Tom and Dillon were loaded light. About the heaviest thing Tom carried was part of a sack of oats. We would take a break about mid-day. They would get to roll in a grassy meadow, eat oats and crop luscious green grass along some creek bank .

Today there were two fires to check. My brother-in-law, Everett Sizemore, went with me. We rode Smokey and Molly and led Tom and Dillon. Everett wasn't accustomed to riding, but he felt sure he could make the forty or fifty mile ride if he could rest a few times. We unloaded the mules and horses at the Seven Lakes Trailhead on Parker Meadows Road.

Just above Black Bear Camp, Snoopy found a porcupine. He barked and yelped until the porcupine climbed a tree. The Forest Service had declared war on this animal because of the trees it damaged. I got down, tied up my horse and shot the animal with my six-shooter. This satisfied Snoopy and we headed on up the trail. A black bear left the trail and went charging down through the huckleberry brush. The noise and smell of the bear frightened Dillon. He stopped in his tracks and nearly jerked me out of the saddle. Later I tied the lead rope to his pack and let him follow along at his own pace.

A white ribbon on a tree limb was our sign to turn off toward the first fire to be checked. We rode up toward Gopher Ridge about two hundred yards and pulled up at the edge of a clearing a short distance from the fire. I pointed toward two bleached-out splinters where lightning had blasted a tree to bits. I showed Everett slabs of wood more than a hundred yards from the strike. A ferocious storm had come across the Cascade Divide and hundreds of lightning strikes hit the ground. There were great torrents of rain and tons of hail came so fast it seemed like it was shot from some giant gun. This one was a far cry

from being a dry lightning storm. It lasted for about six hours. The last crash of thunder rattled along the ridges about two o'clock in the morning.

At daylight Rustler Peak picked up the fire. Crews were dispatched and in due time, the fire was suppressed. Only about half an acre was burned. The crew dispatched to this fire were experienced. The fire had started on the ground and burned into some rotten logs. Finally it spread to nearby snags and green trees. Everett and I spent an hour double-checking every little spot where there might be a hot place. I showed him how to cold-trail a fire with his bare hands. When we finished, we picked up the fire tools the crew had left behind. There was enough equipment for two men, including one cross-cut saw, two shovels, two pulaskis and several five-gallon cans with water still in them to use on the hot spots. We left the cans at the fire.

We headed south toward Alta Lake. Boulder Lake, near the trail above Gopher Ridge, was almost dry. It is a steady climb for the next two miles to Alta Lake. Everett was amazed at the beauty of the blue body of water. Alta Lake is about three quarters of a mile long and shaped like a bow tie. The fish there aren't very big, but it is easy to catch a limit of legal-sized Eastern Brook trout. We pulled up at Violet Hill View Point just off the north end of Alta Lake. We could see for a hundred miles to the north. Seven Lakes Basin was below us to the east and Devil's Peak looked high and rough to the southeast. We rode on toward Heather Ponds and climbed the switchbacks to Devil's Peak Lookout. We stopped only long enough to deliver some mail and drink some coffee.

In the saddle between Lee Peak and Devil's Peak, we hit the Skyline Trail. To the southeast the 90,000 acres of Upper Klamath Lake glistened in the sun. Directly below us there were small openings in the distance which indicated meadows and lakes. We would stop at one of the meadows and eat lunch and give the stock a rest. We would take two or three side trips along the way. By the time we reached the meadow where we ate lunch, we would have ridden over twenty miles.

We dropped off the mountain and down into a deep, broad canyon. There are a lot of small ravines and out-croppings of rock all along the six mile stretch from Devil's Peak to Lake Margurette. I spotted a sunny little meadow through the timber and about a hundred yards off the trail. There was a crooked stream running across one end of it. We left the trail and rode out to a green shady spot where the Red Top and Mountain Brome were belly deep to the horses.

Everett was getting saddle weary. I pulled the saddles from the horses and unpacked the mules. All four animals lay down and rolled to scratch their itchy hides. They ate a ration of oats and then grazed peacefully in the high mountain meadow. Everett started a small Indian fire. It was a trick he had learned in the logging woods. He cut two limbs from a nearby tree. Each limb was forked at the end. When the fire had burned down; the hot coals were just right to toast our sandwiches. With a sandwich laying across the forked end of the stick, we held them over the coals. The bread toasted to a golden brown, first on one side, then on the other; and a dry sandwich was turned into a very tasty treat.

We stayed in the meadow for an hour or so, then repacked and saddled up. It was a beautiful day, but there was still a lot of ground to cover. We rode south to Lake Margurette. The Lake Isherwood Trail was well marked. I had

never seen that lake because it was about a mile off the Skyline Trail. Heavenly Twins, one on each side of the trail, were beautiful like all the other lakes we rode past. Everett kept spotting good places to camp and fish. Land Lake was the last lake we rode past before we left the Skyline Trail and rode up the Wickiup Trail west to the Cascade Divide. About a mile down the west side of the mountain was a pile of rock which marked the trail we would follow to the other fires.

On the west slope of the Cascades from Devil's Peak to Mount McLoughlin, there are dozens of lakes and ponds scattered about in the lava rock. I doubt if any of them could support fish because of the freezing winters. The fish would smother out. Some of the lakes are full of water lillies. We rode past one lake that would be a beautiful spot to build a cabin. The area was park-like on three sides with a dense growth of Mountain Hemlock and Shasta fir on the other.

We watered the stock there and marvelled at the beauty of the place. The timber was open, with huckleberry brush growing thick among the trees. We tied up by a quarter-acre pond. Near the pond was a high bench of lava rock which looked like someone had piled it there, attempting to start some sort of a structure. On top of the pile of rock were large Hemlock trees, lots of brush and two or three other species of trees. We picked our way up the side to the nearly flat top of the mound. One glance told me that the fire was still burning in three places. About ten feet up, a Hemlock tree was smoking. Inside a large hole in the side, I could see red hot coals flickering. We would have to chop the tree down to put out the fire. The other two fires were burning, in deep cracks in the lava rock. Sticks and leaves had accumulated there for years.

I got a pulaski and started to chop. I had been a logger up to the time I got the job with the Forest Service. It would be no problem at all to chop down a tree. It was about twenty-five inches in diameter. Everett and I had both cut timber with crosscut saws. A tree six or seven feet in diameter required a deep undercut. There was four or five times the amount of wood to chop out of an undercut like that, than we would have to chop to fall this two-foot tree. The sharp pulaski fairly bounced when it hit the hard wood. After several swings, I knew how long it would take to fall the tree.

I suppose the Hemlock was over two hundred years old. It was growing on top of the rock pile, and the roots had to work their way down through the rocks to get any moisture at all. The annual growth rate was about 1/32 of an inch or less. That was the reason the wood was so hard and tough. If we took the time to fall the tree, it would be very late before we got home. Maybe we could pile rocks by the tree and build a pier high enough to stand on, then apply water and chop out the burning wood.

Rocks were plentiful, and we made the base of the pier about five feet across. The rough sharp edges and a wide assortment of shapes helped considerably. The tree held it up on one side and it was slanted so I could get a toe-hold to climb up on top. In about half an hour, we had a mound of rock about four feet high. I climbed up and applied five gallons of water by means of a hand pump. A rubber tube was attached to the bottom of the water bag, with the other end attached to the pump. By working the pump back and forth, the water was forced out in a spray. If the rock pier was a foot or so higher, I could chop away some of the opening and dig the hot coals loose and the

water would penetrate better. We did this.

I took Dillon and loaded fifteen gallons of water on his back from the deep end of the pond near the fire. After much digging and chopping and the application of about ten gallons of water, the fire, as far as I was concerned, was dead out. Everett had put the two fires out in the lava rock crevices. After a short rest, we repacked the mules and rode out the same way we had come in.

Everett had never seen this country before and the side trips were all something extra special. He never failed to talk about our trip every time we were together. One good thing about it, the country Everett and I rode through is the same now as it was then, about twenty years ago. Anyone who reads this could retrace our steps and find everything much the same, except the trails are better today. I bet the rock pier is still standing by the old tough Hemlock. No doubt some animal is using the burned-out hole for a home, maybe even a spotted owl.

When we reached Lodgepole late that evening, we had been in the saddle many hours and had traveled nearly fifty miles. There were times when we rode along at six miles an hour. The mules were not packing more than fifty or sixty pounds each, including their pack saddles. I was tired and Everett was really done in after that long, hard, trip.

CHAPTER 34

SEVEN MILE BLOW-UP

Our worst fires were generally in the fall of the year. The summer sun had dried the dead limbs and logs so there was no moisture left in them. A hot spark could kindle a fire easily anyplace it might land. Lightning storms can come up quickly. Fires in the back country are generally caused by lightning and sometimes they get a good start before anyone gets to them. This was the case with a large project fire on the Cedar Creek Trail northwest of Seven Mile Creek on the Klamath District.

The lightning storm came on after dark and there were many hot strikes. One started a fire three miles beyond the end of Dry Creek Road and to the east of the Skyline Trail. There wasn't much rain with the storm and the tinder dry material on the ground burned fast and hot. A slight uphill wind caused the fire to spread quickly. It was daylight before the fire was discovered and by then, twelve acres were already burned off slick and clean.

Smoke-jumpers were called in and dropped at the fire shortly after daylight. Ground crews were dispatched, twelve and fourteen men at a time. Airplanes dropped supplies to the fire-fighters all day long. More supplies were flown in during the next three days as the fire continued to burn. But at last the fire was contained, and the fire-fighters were being released. Left behind was a small five-man crew. They would watch for hot spots and also gather up fire equipment and prepare it for packing out.

Late one evening Doug told me to take three pack animals and my saddle horse and ride out to the fire. I left Lodgepole early the next morning and headed up the trail to Seven Mile. My camp would be at the end of the Dry Creek Road. Doug had told me that I would ride through a logging operation on my way to Seven Mile. He thought I could get around the edge with no trouble. The timber was open and there weren't too many windfalls. This was the Black Bear Timber Sale, one of the sales I had spent many long hours helping to cruise.

Several logging crews passed me on their way to the logging area. A bus load of men slowed down as they came around a turn and saw me. It was loaded with choker-setters, cat skinners, jammer punchers, hookers, knot bumpers and a truck driver or two who had left their trucks on the job the day before. It was too late for them to get a load at the end of the day. Several of the men recognized me because I had worked in the woods with them at one time or another. An hour's ride put me up within hearing distance of the logging. Several D-8 cats were belching diesel smoke as they dozed their way through the felled trees. They were skidding logs off the right-of-way which would eventually become a timber sale road.

I left the Parker Meadows Road and turned onto the Seven Lakes Trail, past Black Bear Camp. It was quiet; there were no campers today. Beyond the

camp, I could hear the noise of the logging operation quite plainly now. The mules were getting nervous. We went up through the trees, knowing that soon there would be huge logs laying across the trail. I guess that is what some call progress. A D-8 bulldozer came chugging along with several large logs tied to the drumline. They had skidded logs from across the trail so we could pass by. Two men were setting chokers for the next drag. I pulled up to talk to them and told them where I was going. They said that when I came back through, there would be a two-lane highway built. With this we went on up the trail toward Seven Lakes Basin, thinking about what the two loggers had said about the road. Along here the trail crossed the right-of-way on a sidehill. When the road was built there would be a thirty or forty foot cut bank, that would cut the trail in two. Then three miles of the old Seven Lakes Trail would be history — just a memory in the minds of a few people like myself.

We traveled along at a good rate of speed. The pack saddles were empty except for oats, pack covers, lash ropes and my sleeping bag. The trail passed through an old burn, where there had been a bad fire in 1910. A dense stand of cedar had grown there along with brush and other vegetation. There was no tall timber along here for quite a ways.

I got into Seven Lakes Basin and found there were several people camped. The weather was beautiful during the day and very cold at night. It was possible to camp in the high country this time of year and enjoy life without being eaten alive by bugs and mosquitos. Snoopy was running along ahead of me chasing squirrels. He stirred up a yellow jackets nest and suffered the consequences for two or three miles up the trail. He had a hard time getting rid of them.

I rode along keeping an eye out for the trail sign marking the side trail we would take. At last there it was. A tree limb obscured some of the writing that said CEDAR SPRINGS TRAIL. I looked for the standard Forest Service trail blaze – a two inch cut about six inches above a ten inch blaze. It showed up plainly, though obviously it hadn't been brightened up for several years. No one had bucked the logs out of the trail for some time, either. We had to go through several dense pole patches and around large trees that had been blown down across the trail. We fought the bad going for two miles until an opening came into view on the left. The closer I rode, the worse it looked. A timber sale had been logged off and the trail was completely obliterated. Someone had given me a bum steer for sure. I got out the radio and called Seven Mile. No one seemed to know where we were or anything about a logged-off area.

There was nothing to do but go on. We fought logging slash and down timber and many times had to back track and start over again. The mules and horses were tired and thirsty. Snoopy's feet were sore and I was disgusted. It was up to me to get us out of this mess. Two more hours went by as I kept looking for a way out of the devastated area. The land was flat and rolling and it was difficult to keep from going in circles. I spotted an old landing up ahead. After we reached it, there was a road, though it was hard telling where it went. I pulled up to let the stock rest and to adjust their saddles, and gave each animal a helping of oats, and fed Snoopy while I had a sandwich and some hot coffee.

We pulled out and followed the dirt road about three miles before we reached a graveled road that was apparently heavily traveled. I rode along the shoulder where the dirt was loose. Finally up ahead there were about forty men

coming toward me. At least they could tell me where we were and how to get to where I wanted to go.

Fire Control Officer, Paul Brady, drove up in his pickup. He had begun to think I wouldn't make it out of the woods before dark. He took out a map and I showed him where the Cedar Springs Trail Junction was on the Skyline Trail. The old trail had been abandoned for five years and he didn't know that the sign had not been removed. A new trail had been built four miles farther along the Skyline Trail. It would have taken me to my campsite. From here to where I wanted to make camp was only a short distance. At the end of the Dry Creek Road was a small flat spot at the foot of a sharp rise. It reminded me of a round flat-bottomed bowl. A canvas tank supported by a pipe framework held water for the stock. Hay had been hauled in from Seven Mile Camp. Hot food was brought to me and there was a sackful of scraps for Snoopy.

The mules were so tired they wouldn't eat and Snoopy's feet were bleeding. I doctored the sore spots and put a bandage on one foot that had a shallow cut. About two o'clock in the morning the mules started eating. They cleaned up the oats and then chomped hay until I rolled out of bed just before daylight and put their pack saddles on. The night had passed too quickly for me, but the stock were rested.

I headed up the trail early. The day was going to be a hot one. The fire was still five miles away from camp and another two miles off the trail. Nobody seemed to know how much gear there was to pack out or what there was besides hand tools. I had tied Snoopy up and left him in camp because his feet were so sore. Hopefully he would be able to travel when the job was finished. It was a long ride from here to Lodgepole.

I left the Cedar Springs Trail at a place that was marked by a sign which said FIRE. Out through the timber there were white ribbons tied to tree limbs marking the way. Three men were waiting for me and there were several piles of axes, pulaskis; shovels and cross-cut saws. As I rode up the men were pouring the water out of five-gallon water bags and piling them in a spot where they would be easy to load. There were two large piles of parachutes which had been used in dropping equipment.

Out beyond the fire about a mile was a pond. A hoseline was laid out and two pumps had been used to force the water through a 1-1/2 inch hose to the fire. The men would have to roll the hose and pile it along the way so I could gather it up. The hand tools went on first. Tom and Dillon looked like traveling hardware displays. Smokey carried the parachutes on our first trip out. It took us four hours to make a round trip, just traveling, loading and unloading. My last trip at the end of the first day was a little faster. It was mostly the bulky things like empty five-gallon cans and garbage, which were never left in the wilderness.

I was coming down the trail, bone weary, about half a mile from camp when I heard Snoopy barking and growling. His voice was high-pitched and excited. I touched my horse with one spur and hurried along to see what the commotion was all about. We broke over a little rise, and my camp was in full view. There were three men in camp and from here it looked like they were attempting to get at my belongings and Snoopy was about to tear them apart. One man looked like he was about to hit Snoopy with a rock. I grabbed my six-shooter

and fired a couple of shots in the air, dropped the lead rope and spurred my horse along at a dead run toward camp.

I didn't like the idea of anyone teasing my dog and never bothered to put my gun away until I knew why they were there. One fellow looked a little sick as the other two were explaining what they were doing. It seemed that the cook at Seven Mile Camp had heard about Snoopy being unable to travel with me because of his sore feet. He had sent some choice bones with meat still clinging to them so Snoopy could keep himself occupied while he waited for me. As I rode up, they had been trying to get close enough to Snoopy to see how badly his feet were hurt. What had looked to me like a rock in the man's hand, was the large bone he had started to toss to Snoopy. The men then produced more food for Snoopy, who cooled down as I rode up. He even let one of the men pick him up to look at his feet.

I fed and watered the stock and then rode down to camp with the men to eat with the crew at the mess hall. On the third day, I packed six mule-loads of fire hose and two fire pumps from the fire and my part of the job was done. All had gone smoothly, except on the first load of fire hose. I miscounted and got too many rolls of hose on Dillon, and he bucked it off along the trail. A mule can carry eight hundred feet of wet hose and a thousand feet of dry hose, CJRL (cotton-jacketed and rubber-lined) . Linen hose is lighter and there is a hundred feet to the roll instead of fifty feet in a cotton roll.

Dillon was carrying a thousand feet of heavy wet hose. Somehow I lost count when I picked the hose up along the trail from the lake to the fire. I thought his load looked a bit large, but he walked along quite well until he stepped down from a small rock ledge which crossed the trail. The hose tipped forward enough to hurt his shoulders, and he cut loose and scattered hose every which-a-way in a sixty foot circle. He kicked one roll of hose with both hind feet before it hit the ground. It came undone as it flew through the air and landed in the lower limbs of a bushy hemlock tree. Dillon always did a complete job of bucking a load off once he started. He was an expert.

I reloaded sixteen rolls, tied them down and left the other four rolls in a pile alongside the trail. I would bring them out on my last trip. A truck was waiting to haul the hose to Klamath Falls. After a short rest and a hot lunch, I went back to get my last load. Things had gone surprisingly well. There had been no yellow jackets, nor anything to cause excitement, except when Dillon unloaded the fire hose.

The trail wound around some small cliffs and large serviceberry bushes on almost flat ground. It was behind one of these bushes that I had stacked the four extra rolls of hose from Dillon's load. My horse was trotting when he saw the pile of hose. He jumped straight up and bounded sideways and then started to buck. I'm no expert rider, but no horse ever bucked me off if there were enough things to grab hold of. He bucked right through a tall clump of serviceberry brush, and all the coaxing in the world couldn't get him back anywhere near the pile of hose. That little episode had caught me completely by surprise.

We went to the fire and headed toward the lake, picking up hose on the way. When Tom was loaded, I tied the load down and let him follow along behind. Dillon had a load by the time we reached the lake. Smokey had to carry the two fire pumps. They weighed about seventy-five pounds apiece. I noticed

a wooden box that hadn't been opened. It appeared to be food of some kind. There were about fifty meat sandwiches in it. It had been dropped at the fire just after the main crew had left. I opened up several sandwich bags and smelled of the contents. The lettuce was wilted, but nothing was spoiled. Tom was eying the box with interest, so I offered him a sandwich. He made a terrible noise slurping and slobbering and smacking his lips as he ate it down, then begged for more. Tom and Dillon ate most of the sandwiches while Smokey and Spook preferred the green grass around the pond.

The fireman with me couldn't get over how well the mules liked the sandwiches. After they had polished off about twenty each, he remarked he would hate to take one of the mules out to a cafe for lunch! The trip back to camp was uneventful except for my horse. He refused to go near the pile of hose I had left by the trail. So I tied him to a tree several yards away while I loaded the hose on Smokey. She had the lightest load. Before we headed for home, a man from Seven Mile came up and gave me several articles of food to take along in case I didn't make it home until the next day. It was about 3:00 p.m. when I turned in my saddle and waved to the man standing behind the truck. It would be after midnight when we got to Lodgepole, if I didn't run into any trouble. On the trail where Dillon had unloaded the hose, Spook started up again. He wouldn't go near the spot even though the hose was gone. The reason I had named the brown horse Spook was that he would jump at the slightest movement. He wasn't a mean horse, but he sure was nervous. Whenever a greenhorn forester wanted to take a ride, he would always shy away from Spook. The name alone was enough to scare him off. I liked that because it kept the inexperienced rider off a good horse.

As I got Spook under control and rode on down the trail, Snoopy ran ahead feeling glad to be free again. His feet were in fair shape now and I could hear him barking up ahead like he had treed something. Soon I saw the lower part of an animal showing below a bushy limb about ten feet above the ground. My first thought was that it was a porcupine. The least I could do was to ride over and take a look. As I went under the tree, there was a big commotion. Loose bark and dead limbs came showering down all around us and Spook went to bucking and running out through the timber. Just pure luck kept me in the saddle. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Dillon go up a rock slide on the face of a cliff. Smokey and Tom were long gone.

When Spook settled down to where I could concentrate on what was happening, I saw that the animal in the tree was a yearling black bear. I sat and watched as the bear worked his way down the tree and crawled out on a big deformed limb about ten feet above the ground. Snoopy was fairly turning handsprings trying to reach the bear as he teetered on the limb. The bear hesitated several minutes looking the situation over carefully. Then he jumped as far as he could out over Snoopy and ran up the rock slide where Dillon had gone. Snoopy and the bear disappeared over the hill and everything was quiet.

Dillon had been peering around a rock ledge watching all the activity; but when the bear took off in his direction, he came down around the rock slide as fast as his legs could carry him and didn't stop until he was standing close to me. I got down and rubbed his neck and head to get him over his fright. He was at ease almost immediately. Tom saw that everything was in the clear, and

he came tip-toeing back toward me. Smokey came swinging up the trail like nothing had happened. As usual, when something exciting happened, it was short-lived and intense.

We traveled along the Cedar Springs Trail until it intersected the Skyline Trail, and headed south toward the Seven Lakes Basin. The animals knew we were heading home and clipped along at a good rate of speed. Snoopy caught up with us and raced ahead looking for another bear. It was good to be headed for home. Snoopy came running back toward me to check on our progress then dashed down the trail again, disappearing over a little rise. A few minutes later, I heard him barking and carrying on something fierce. We rounded a curve in the trail and I saw that Snoopy had treed two cub bears, each one up a different tree. The mother bear and a yearling were running up a hill to escape.

I rode up near the cubs and saw that one was coal black and the other about the color of a mouse. My horses and mules didn't seem frightened at all, but Snoopy was about to go wild. He wanted me to shoot the cubs but that was no good at all. I watched for awhile and had turned to ride away when I noticed that one of the cubs was starting down the tree, keeping it between him and Snoopy. He hit the ground and scampered away with Snoopy hot after him. He made it up another tree.

While Snoopy was after the one cub, the twin worked his way down the tree and took off in the opposite direction. Snoopy saw him trying to escape and gave chase. The two cubs kept this up until they were about a hundred yards apart. It was getting late so I pulled out and rode on toward the sunset. In about half an hour, Snoopy caught up with me and dashed ahead again, looking for still more excitement. If it hadn't been so late, it would have been interesting to stay and watch the cubs longer.

I rode between the spring and the shelter at Grass Lake in the half light. When the sun drops behind Violet Hill, Seven Lakes Basin gets dark fast. By the time I reached South Lake, it was hard to see the water except for the reflection of the stars overhead. Just below the Alta Lake Junction there is a narrow stretch of trail with several big trees on either side. Some of the large tree roots growing across the trail had been left to substitute for water-bars to turn the water out of the trail and prevent the trail from washing out.

It was one of these roots that caused Smokey to take a real tumble. Planting both front feet against it, she reared back and jerked the lead rope out of my hand. Her hind legs crumpled under her, she made two complete somersaults backward down the trail, went over the side and rolled down the mountain more than a hundred feet and landed in a pile of poles. Just before dark I had tied the mules together with Smokey in the lead and when Smokey went over, Tom and Dillon followed her all the way down. I don't believe their lead ropes ever got tight.

I tied Spook to a tree and went down to rescue old Smokey. After pulling her pack and saddle off, I felt all over her body for punctures or cuts or sticks that might still be stuck in her hide. She wasn't hurt at all, only embarrassed and nervous.

In the dark, I got Smokey back on the trail and repacked, then tied the lead ropes up on Tom and Dillon and we rode on toward the summit. There were

stars overhead but no moon. There was nothing but blackness ahead of me. The only way I knew when we passed Frog Lake was by the trail tread underfoot. It was dirt for quite a ways. Above and below the lake the tread is rocky. At King Spruce Junction, the stock picked up speed until they were well past the turnoff. They wanted to make sure we weren't going to turn toward King Spruce.

There was a spring near the trail about half a mile below the junction. Snoopy dashed ahead and ran pell-mell between Spook's front legs. Spook went straight up and landed stiff-legged. Boy! What a jolt. All my joints felt the same as when you bump your elbow on the edge of a table. After that, I really tightened myself down to the old saddle; I was too close to home now to get bucked off.

The timber opened up, and we entered an old burn where there was brush and short cedar trees. It was a shade lighter here. Soon I heard the rushing waters of Nichol's Creek and knew it was only a short ride further to my truck. We were moving along, when Spook stopped short in his tracks. I could see no reason for the stop and feeling irritated and impatient with him, I touched him with my left spur.

He responded instantly and we were suddenly airborne. Spook had stepped off a sheer cutbank and we dropped about forty feet and landed in belly-deep mud. Smokey was standing beside me when Spook stepped off the bank. I instinctively gripped the lead rope and jerked it taut. It threw Smokey off balance, the bank gave way and 1300 pounds of horse flesh crashed down beside me. For a moment, I sat there stunned. What had happened? I looked up from where we had fallen. Tom and Dillon were standing side by side looking down at us. I could just make out their white pack covers between me and the sky.

As Spook began to climb out of the ditch, I remembered what the loggers had told me three days ago. "By the time you get back from the fire", they had said, "there will be a road across this trail." Back on the trail again we rode on slowly until I located my truck. The loggers had parked it with the tailgate toward a bank so I could load the horses and mules easily.

I drove toward Lodgepole feeling tired and a little numb. It was 2:00 in the morning when I walked up from the barn and into the house, which was cold and empty. The family had to live in Butte Falls so the kids could go to school. In the kitchen, I touched a match to my gas lantern and started a fire in the stove, put on the coffee pot and fixed something to eat. Snoopy had already curled up on a rug by the woodbox and could care less about food. The three-day trip had been a tough one. Spook had carried me over one hundred miles.

CHAPTER 35

SAD DAY FOR RUSTY

AND BESSIE'S LAST STAND

Gordon Jesse Walker and pack string.
Last trip to Bessie Rock Lookout

Early the next morning I called Doug. He was glad to hear that I was back and told me he would send up a mule-load of batteries to be packed in to Devil's Peak. The lookout radio had gone dead. I was a little stove-up, but it would be a lot better making another twenty-mile ride than staying around Lodgepole with the family gone.

I decided to ride Molly and pack the batteries on Rusty, the strawberry roan. She was a big rangey mare weighing about 1300 pounds, with a disposition that made a person think she might be half grizzly bear. She would kick and bite and stomp and paw at you. If anyone was rash enough to stand near her rear-end, she would slash them across the face with her tail. She got different expressions on her face, depending on the mood she happened to be in. To be burdened with a pack saddle was a direct insult to her and just about anything could happen while you were loading her. But once her load was on and tied down good, she would follow perfectly, and never try to rub it off or lie down and roll with it.

I hauled the two horses to Black Bear Camp. Snoopy stayed behind because his feet were sore again. He didn't like the idea of being locked up in the shop. I unloaded the stock and tied Rusty to a tight-barked Hemlock while I tied her pack down. The batteries weighed about sixty pounds. They were rolled up in a pack cover so that an equal amount hung down a ways on either side. It made a good light sling-pack. She tried every way she could think of to bluff me out. As a last resort, she turned her head and peeled a chunk of bark off the tree with her teeth, chewed it up and spit it out. She kept this up until I tied off the end of the lash rope.

This was the last trip Rusty would ever make with me. She belonged to our District Ranger, who was being transferred to another forest. There was no way for him to keep her there, and he would have to sell her. She had a light pack-load, and we took plenty of time along the trail so Rusty could eat all the sedge and huckleberry brush she wanted. We stopped at Frog Lake to get a drink, and I pulled off my boots and soaked my feet in the cold water for awhile. After half an hour or so, we went on to Devil's Peak. I took Rusty's pack off and unsaddled her. While she ate and rested, the new batteries were hooked up and the lookout boy called Doug.

As I look back over the years and remember the horses and mules I thought the most of, every single one of them had an ornery streak of some kind. One old red sorrel mare I called Kit would stomp your toes if you touched her on the chest. She would squeal and bite at the slightest provocation, but I loved her much. Kit carried me over many miles of trails and roads. She herded cattle and chased horses with me on her back. I blame near cried when she died at 27, and felt much the same way about the others too; Rusty was no exception. She was different, a real challenge to a packer. She tried her best to bluff me out, but eventually she would always give in to what I wanted. I roached her mane and combed her tail. She never seemed to appreciate any attention given her at all.

We headed on down the Seven Lakes Trail; and since it was our last trip together, I made several side trips so as to prolong the day. We stopped in every grassy meadow we came to so she could crop the succulent Red-Top and Mountain Brome.

I got back to Lodgepole around 6:00 in the evening. A pickup with a horse trailer was parked in the driveway. The driver said he was going to take Rusty away. She was to be sold the next day at an auction to the highest bidder. I unloaded the stock and took Rusty's pack saddle off. After she finished eating her oats, I walked over and curried her back and checked for rubbed spots, then led her over to the tailgate of the horse trailer, and she walked right in. I felt sad indeed when we slammed the tailgate shut and fastened it tight. I took one last look as the trailer bounced across the cattleguard and disappeared in a cloud of dust. The roan mare whinnied as I turned my back and went into the house. None of us at Lodgepole would ever see Rusty again.

The weekend was rather quiet. On Monday morning, I headed up the trail to Bessie Rock with three pack animals and riding Sundee. My brother-in-law, Johnnie Van Meter, went with me to look over some good elk-hunting country. He was an avid sportsman and enjoyed being out where there is a lot of excitement. Our pack-load included a gas cook stove and a heater for the

Bessie Rock Lookout. Dillon had packed one to Devil's Peak a while back, and now he would have the opportunity to pack another one.

We arrived at the end of the Bessie Rock Trail near Bessie Shelter. Dwight Moore was waiting for us. He and Johnnie would walk to the lookout, and I would follow with the pack stock loaded with the stove. The men didn't believe me when I told them how simple it was to put the cook stove on Dillon. Dwight thought it should be put on top, but it just wouldn't work. Johnnie held the lead rope while Dwight and I put the stove in place on a special carrier to hold it up until I lashed it down. About 80 pounds of rock off-set the stove so the load would be perfectly balanced. Some packers might argue the point, but Dillon didn't mind. He would get some extra oats for his trouble.

Johnnie and Dwight went ahead of me and Snoopy spent a lot of time running back and forth between me and the hikers. Dillon carried the load like a real champ. He never bumped a tree or rubbed the bank on the upper side of the trail. Yellow jackets hurt when they stung him on the belly, and he bucked and kicked hard; but he never once put a scratch on the shiny white stove. Tom packed two boxes of food with a new gas heating stove for a top pack. Smokey carried two ten gallon tanks of gas with a top pack of miscellaneous equipment to install the stoves. Dillon followed along behind with the main load.

Johnnie and Dwight were waiting for me at the foot of Bessie Rock. They eyed Dillon as he walked past to the hitching rail. We took the stove off first and carried it to the cable car. After the other animals were unpacked and the saddle cinches loosened, the three of us climbed the ladder to the lookout. It was quite an experience for Johnnie since he had never been there before.

It was lunchtime so we decided to eat before we settled down to the task of getting the stoves to the top of the rock. The visibility was outstanding. Mountain peaks and ranges of mountains showed up sharp and clear. What a place to sit and eat lunch.

In about an hour, we descended the ninety-six foot ladder to the base of the rock and tried to figure a way to get the fancy cookstove to the top in one piece.

It was too big to fit in the cable-car. We finally agreed on what seemed like a workable solution. I took a snatch-block (pulley that opens up at the top so it can be slipped over a cable or rope) and hung it over the cable that the cable-car ran on. I tied a lash rope securely around the bottom of the stove. We shoved the top end into the cable-car as far as it would go and tied it down. The rope which I had put around the bottom of the stove was then tied to the snatch-block to hold the stove level.

Dwight climbed the ladder and waited for my signal to start cranking on the low-geared winch. Johnnie and I sized up our handiwork and decided it was now or never. I raised my arm and Dwight responded. The cable-car, stove and all, started creeping along the line toward the top. The distance from the anchor tree to the rock top was about 350 feet. The first 100 feet went smoothly, but then the stove began swaying to and fro above the Red Blanket side of Bessie Rock. If it fell out now, we would just have to scratch one stove. It was more than 200 feet to the rugged slope below, and then it would bounce and roll for another eighth of a mile before it stopped. I doubt that there would have been any porcelain left on it by the time it came to rest in the canyon

below.

Dwight was watching the ascent of the stove with much concern. He, too, felt a little uneasy. All at once the winchline got slack almost as though it had broken in two. The cable-car fell back about two feet and stopped with a violent jerk. It rocked back and forth and the stove slipped sideways. What had happened was that Dwight forgot to keep his eye on the winchline on the drum. It piled up on one side and finally the pile of cable gave way, and that caused the trouble. There wasn't a word spoken until the stove stopped swaying, mostly because we were all holding our breath. I was ready to let it down and start over, but Johnnie argued that it was just as bad to let it down, as it would be to take it on up. I hoped he was right, but reckoned it was anybody's guess.

Dwight Moore

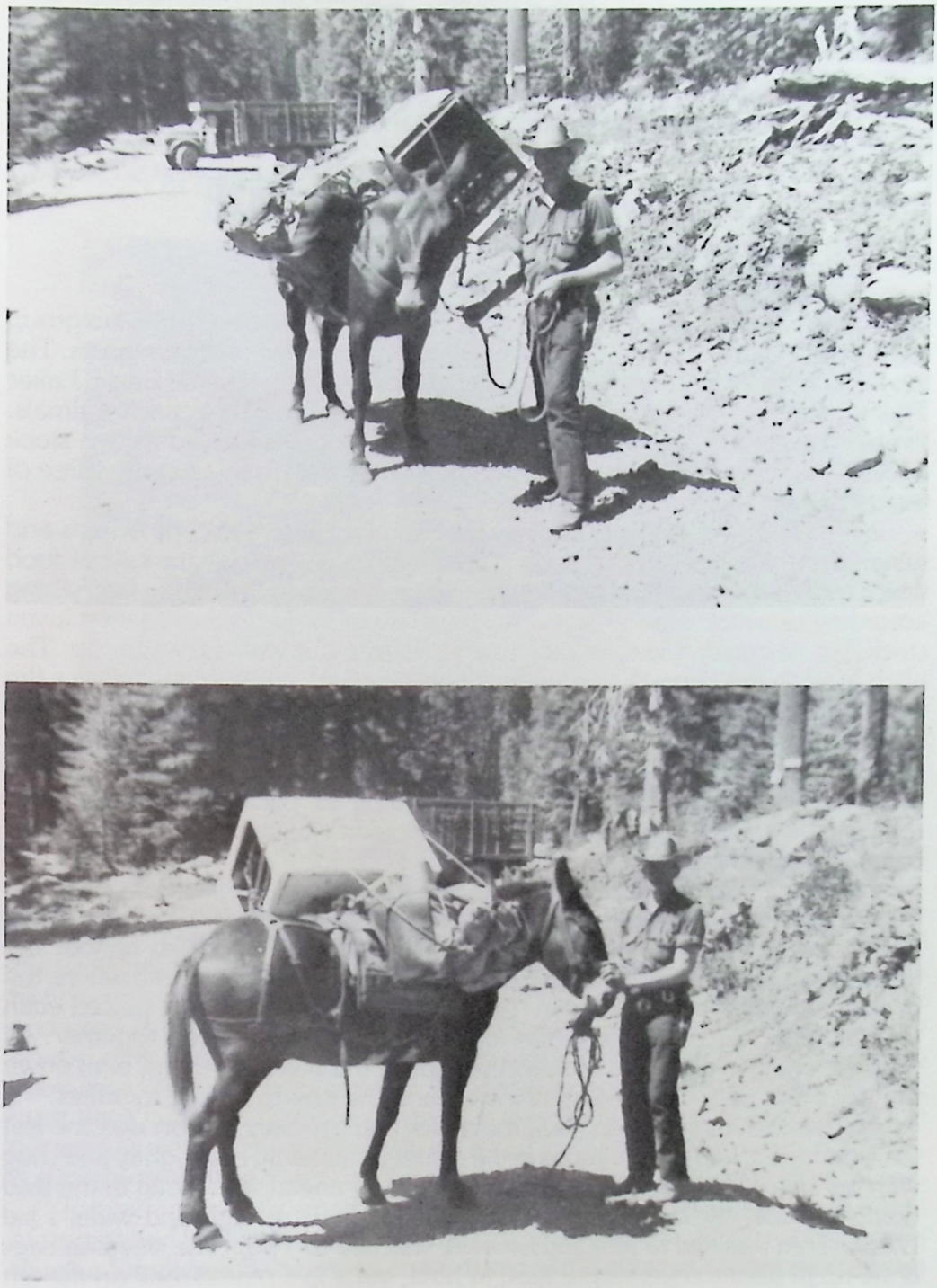
Dwight started to crank away again with shaky hands. He hardly took his eye off the winch drum after that. He played the line back and forth as he cranked and there were no more pileups of the cable. Johnnie climbed the ladder and met the stove at the top of the rock. He had to lift it up a little so as to clear a rough spot. I could hardly stand to watch, as I waited until the lower end of the cable car disappeared over the ledge. Then I heaved a great sigh of relief and climbed up the ladder.

Johnnie and Dwight had the stove out of the cable-car and were on their way through the door with it when I came puffing up the last flight of steps. There wasn't a single scratch on the pretty white stove. We talked and laughed about the whole thing while we rested up and drank the coffee left over from our lunch. It didn't take long to bring everything else up to the top. Dwight planned on staying and installing the two stoves. Since my part was done, Johnnie and I bid him farewell and headed for Lodgepole.

When the first ladder was constructed up the side of Bessie Rock, someone packed the materials in over the trail on a mule's back. It may have been only a few pounds of nails and some haywire, but nevertheless a mule played an important part. When the house was built on top of the rock, pack mules carried every shingle and board that was used. For many years there was mule-load after mule-load of equipment and supplies packed from Imnaha to Bessie Rock Lookout. When the trip was made from Lodgepole, the trail crossed two forks of Rogue River and more than a dozen creeks – some of them pretty good sized. It was a twenty-six mile round trip from Lodgepole.

I did all the packing to Bessie Rock from both Lodgepole and Imnaha for six years. One summer I packed seven different men and their supplies to and from Bessie Rock. Each trip was always two mule-loads, and many times there were four or five mule-loads. During the 35 or 40 years that Bessie Rock was used as a fire detection station, there must have been dozens of trips and hundreds of mule-loads of supplies packed in to the place, by many different packers. But I was the packer who made the last trip to the lookout with mules. That was the day Tom and Dillon carried the first modern conveniences to the lookout, and I used my hitch to hold down the loads. Right after that, a timber sale road was built to the base of the rock. The new road mutilated the old trail. What the road didn't ruin, the timber sale did.

From then on until the lookout was discontinued, the station was supplied by a pickup truck instead of a mule. Another era had slipped by almost unnoticed. One less job for me and my mules. There would come a time probably during my career with the Forest Service when there would be no more need for my Government mules. The thought made me sad because as far as I was concerned, the Forest Service would take a great stride backwards when that happened.



Last pack trip to Bessie Rock Lookout

CHAPTER 36

ACCIDENT AT GRASS LAKE – MY SON'S FIRST PACK TRIP

Toward the end of my job as a packer, Doug and I took a 4-H Club group to Seven Lakes Basin. Everything that went in was packed on three mules. The trip began on a Friday morning. About9:00 o'clock, I drove to the Seven Lakes Trail on Parker Meadows Road and unloaded Molly and the pack animals. People began to arrive in cars and pickups. The horses arrived in two stock trucks. In no time at all, there were people all over the place—twenty-three of them. Tom and Dillon were uneasy.

All the sleeping bags were in heavy plastic containers except Doug's and mine. They would be slick to pack. There was an enormous amount of food which included a lot of fresh vegetables. Doug left me to arranging everything according to which mule or horse the stuff would be packed on. Doug loved stock, but he couldn't keep a load on a mule even if it walked on tip toe. The hitch I use to this day will take an awful beating and still stay tight unless the rope is cut in two. While I was planning the loads, two of the club group, Mrs. Ragsdale and Mrs. Earl Jossey, walked toward me with a large box. I took a look and it contained about fifty of the most beautiful tomatoes one could wish for. They were interested in how I was going to pack them. They even suggested we might leave them behind. I wouldn't have left those tomatoes behind if it meant a special trip for me.

I took the box of tomatoes and started to work on the task of preparing them for the trip. Each tomato was at least 4 inches across. I found a heavy pasteboard box, and with my knife, slit each corner down to almost the thickness of the tomatoes then cut the box along each side and end where the pasteboard could be folded over. The women were watching. I placed each tomato in the homemade box. The idea was to hold them firmly together. All fifty of them fit in perfectly. I folded the ends of the box over them, bent down the sides and wrapped binding twine around the box to hold it together.

It took about an hour to pack the mules and Smokey. Dillon was the last to tie down. He had the tomatoes in the center of his back, held tightly and snug with my special lash. All the other riders went on ahead with Doug in the lead riding Sundee, his favorite bay mare. The loads were high and wide. I led Dillon. Tom was tied to him and Smokey was tied to Tom. The sleeping bags done up in plastic covers were hard to hold, but a five pound rock on the left side of Smokey's load evened it up. I made it to Grass Lake in 3 1/2 hours with hardly any trouble at all.

People came running from everywhere when I rode up. Doug helped with the unpacking of Smokey. Mrs. Ragsdale and Mrs. Jossey were standing by

when Dillon's pack was unloaded. Sleeping bags were tossed on a pack cover in a pile. Other articles were taken off and at last there was the box which held the tomatoes. I took the box down and walked over to a makeshift table. Three women were looking over my shoulder. With the string cut loose, I opened the box, bending the sides and ends down so the tomatoes would show. Every tomato was just as good as it was when we left the end of the trail nine miles away. The women were amazed.

Old Parker Meadows Road

That evening we had a jolly time. The best steak I ever ate in my life was served me for supper. The women-folks cooked all the food over an open fire, and they were experts. They piled some jagged rocks in a circle about three feet across. There was an opening at one side to poke wood through. Tom had packed in an iron grate tied on the top of his covered load. It was large enough to fit across the three foot circle of rocks. They built a hot fire in the fireplace and used lots of small dry wood. The men gathered some dry fir bark to put on top of that. In an hour or less, there was a nice bed of super-hot coals to cook over. The three women laid the steaks on top of the open grate. There must have been ten or fifteen tasty morsels cooking at once, and cooked just the way we wanted them. Boy! What a meal! It took two plates for each person. A steak by itself filled one plate. I got to eat one large sliced tomato all by myself.

Just before we all turned in for the night, I heard horses fighting. Several of us grabbed flashlights and went running to the rescue. Molly was okay and so were Smokey and the mules. It was some of the other stock that was causing all the fuss. Dianne Gardner rode a pretty little dark brown mare. It was her own animal. One of the horses ran the mare into the pasture fence and cut an ugly gash at the top of her left front leg. We doctored it as best we could and then everybody went to bed.

The next day was full of fun – swimming, fishing and hiking. About six people took a boat and paddled out toward the center of Grass Lake to catch a mess of fish. I volunteered to stay with the 4-H kids and pole a raft around while they enjoyed swimming. The day was beautiful for as late in the year as it was. The water was warm for about two feet down. Below that, it was ice cold. The kids were swimming and having a ball.

They threatened to throw me in too, just for the fun of seeing me get wet. We had lunch in groups. Seemed like we were eating all the time.

About the middle of the afternoon, we noticed the rubber raft heading toward the shore. I poled our raft toward them to ask how many fish they had caught. To our surprise there was no answer from anyone. We could see one woman holding her head with something over her eyes. Someone was hurt! We all went ashore and followed the group to the shelter. Mrs. Ragsdale had a fish-hook lodged in her lower eyelid. They tried every way they could think of to remove the hook. There was no way. The poor woman wasn't feeling good. We tried our best to help.

Doug radioed to headquarters to tell them our problem. We would have to ride out tonight and get Mrs. Ragsdale to a doctor. I volunteered to take the lead. It was a moonlit night. Molly was pure white and would be easy to follow after dark. Mrs. Ragsdale's right eye was bandaged so it would be immobilized. She could see through a hole in the bandage with her left eye. She rode directly behind me on her horse as her husband, Wallace, followed close behind on his horse. It was very dark until we reached the summit two miles from Grass Lake. I held my hand up above my head when we passed through trees. If a limb struck my hand, I warned Mrs. Ragsdale so she could avoid getting hit in the face. Had it not been for her eye hurting so badly, the trip out would have been a beautiful ride. There is something about a moonlit night that makes horseback riding very special.

Snoopy, my bear dog

We reached the end of the trail sometime after midnight. Wallace loaded his horses in their trailer and headed for the hospital with his wife. A doctor would be there to extract the hook from her eyelid. Molly and I went on to Lodgepole feeling low and lonely after having so much company and excitement. I heard later that the doctor removed the hook with ease, and Mrs. Ragsdale suffered no ill effects from the accident.

While I was a packer and mule skinner, many strange and exciting things happened. Seemed like when someone was lost or hurt back there in the wilderness, it was I who went to the rescue. On one occasion, my mission was to repair the Grass Lake pasture fence and dig a new garbage pit. There was no one there except me. I set up camp in the Grass Lake shelter and worked until dark, then went to camp and started a big fire and got ready to cook a bite to eat .

Snoopy was on edge. He wouldn't lie down and rest like he usually did. I half-way expected to see a bear come strolling by. But instead there were voices from just outside the shelter. It was a man and a woman, each leading a burro, one black and the other white. When they saw the shelter was occupied, they pulled up short then started away. I called to them and walked over to where they were. An elderly couple was out for a bit of fun camping in the wilderness. They had hoped the shelter would be unoccupied so they could have a place to stay.

Grass Lake, Seven Lakes Basin

I introduced myself and offered to move out so they could use the shelter. They were Mr. and Mrs. Watson who had spent a lot of time traveling the Skyline Trail. The Watsons didn't want to put me to any trouble; but with my insisting, they decided to take advantage of my offer. In half an hour or so, I was moved out and set up in a new campsite with a nice warming fire burning bright. I prepared something to eat and leaned back to rest up while enjoying

a hot meal. I noticed a flashlight coming toward my camp; and as the light drew near, I saw it was Mrs. Watson carrying a pan filled with hot brown biscuits and half a pound of butter. She made them for me. After talking for a few moments, she went back to her camp at the shelter. Believe me, those hot biscuits and butter were a real treat.

The night passed quickly. The Watsons were up by daylight with a nice fire burning brightly in front of the old Grass Lake shelter. As for me, I just took it easy until about 6:00 o'clock before I got up to start the day, then went to look at the stock to see if everything was okay. On my way back to camp, I heard a sound like a muffled scream. The Watsons were standing between the spring and the shelter. Mrs. Watson was rolling up the legs of her blue jeans very carefully . I walked toward them. Mr. Watson said his wife had just spilled a pan of hot bacon grease on her legs. Large blisters were forming rapidly from her knees down. Now what could we do? She couldn't ride my horse. At first it looked like she wouldn't be able to walk. After an hour or so of trying to figure out what to do, Mrs. Watson thought the best way was to walk out to the end of the trail. They packed up and headed for home. It made me feel very sad.

All during the time we lived at Lodgepole, our children were growing up. Don was ten years old now, and I wanted to take him with me on at least one trip. If we could have spent a year or two more at the station, Don would have been a mule skinner.

There was a two-day trip coming up shortly, and if there wasn't a lightning storm that day, Don would get to go with me. I borrowed a mare from my friend Chuck Hayes. Her name was Brinkie. She was a good kid's horse and I was sure she would take good care of Don. We took a short ride or two so Don could get the feel of the saddle, although he had ridden some before.

Doug came to Lodgepole the day before the trip. We made our plans and got supplies and equipment packed in the pack bags and boxes and patched some rigging. Don was excited about the trip. In the morning, Don was up and raring to go. He got the horses and mules saddled for the long trip. Doug came in about 7:00 o'clock and moments later we were loaded and driving toward the Seven Lakes Trail. Doug wanted to look some things over in Seven Lakes Basin so we let him and Sundee off there. Don and I drove on to Big Ben Creek where the Hemlock Lake Trail started.

It didn't take long to get the packs on Tom and Dillon. Don was in the saddle, anxious to get going. I climbed up on Molly and we headed out. It's a long ride from the Parker Meadows Road to Hemlock Lake—about seven miles. The day was just beautiful. I let Don ride ahead and told him to hang on and ride fast if the mules stirred up a yellow jacket nest.

At a certain place on the trail just short of Hemlock Lake, I told Don to look straight ahead and ride slow. We started up a little hill toward a plateau-like flat up ahead. Soon Don pulled Brinkie up short. I rode up beside him and there was Hemlock Lake. Don was looking at the sparkling body of water with amazement. It really is a breath-taking sight. He spurred up and rode along the lake edge, never taking his eyes off the beautiful clearwater lake.

We left some equipment for the trail crew at their camp, then showed Don around and rode east toward Devil's Peak. The new trail from Hemlock Lake to the ridge-top wasn't finished yet. The route I had traveled for the past two

years was steep and rocky in most places but Brinkie wouldn't have any trouble. Molly took the lead following her old tracks back and forth up the mountainside through heavy timber. Brinkie was close behind with a happy excited boy on her back. Finally I put Don ahead of me like before and told him to look straight ahead and keep moving. He topped a little rise and there in front of him was another little freshwater lake. We got down and looked the area over some before we made our last long ride to the top. The little lake was about sixty feet across and as round as a bowl. We had stopped here many times and enjoyed the peace and quiet of the wilderness.

I took the lead now as we headed through small timber toward a high cliff. We were going to ride right up it. The cliff, or rim rock, ran along the mountainside about two hundred yards. At about the center of the outcropping, the rock caved off and fell downhill forming a steep rock and dirt slide. It was about a hundred yards up through the break which was at least sixty feet wide. By staying close to the right edge, the horses could work their way up to the top. Don hung on for dear life as Brinkie struggled up the narrow cut. We took a breather when we reached level ground and looked back over our route. We couldn't see a thing except tree tops covering hundreds of acres of ground below us. There was nothing indicating any of the half-dozen lakes in that vast wilderness.

We followed a draw for about half a mile, then headed uphill toward a rocky opening we could see through the trees. As we rode leisurely along over the shale rock, it jingled as the steel horse and mule shoes struck against the flat thin rocks. It sounded like walking on a lot of dinner plates. We rode on toward Shale Butte, following a long narrow ridge. Upper Klamath Lake sparkled in the distance east of us. West, there were several smaller lakes and ponds in the valley below. At one point on the trail, the ridge narrowed down to no more than eight feet across, for a distance of sixty feet. Horses and mules had to pick their way over large rocks, but the sure-footed animals never missed a step.

Don was ahead of me again. I told him to look straight ahead if it made him dizzy to look down into the canyons below. We crossed the narrow stretch of trail and he hung on to the saddlehorn and kept his eyes straight ahead. On the east side of Shale Butte, I showed him where Snoopy had caused a major rockslide that came near to sweeping my pack string and me to the bottom of the canyon, several hundred feet below. Don was looking at country he had heard me talk about since he was four years old. He was thrilled beyond words.

We continued on to Devil's Peak and left mail for the lookout. After a short visit, we dropped down the ridge to the saddle between Lee Peak and Devil's Peak. From here, we rode down the Skyline Trail into Seven Lakes Basin. Doug had supper nearly ready when we rode into camp. Don rested up while I put the horses and mules out in the pasture.

A storm was approaching. We began to hear thunder. Don and I stacked a bunch of wood near a tree and put a pack cover over it to keep it dry. Soon it started to rain. We stretched a canvas about ten feet above the fireplace. At least our campfire wouldn't go out. The rain became a downpour. Great torrents of water fell from the sky. Small streams appeared everywhere. Water filled each little dip and low place brimful. We stretched lash ropes between trees and hung up several pack covers to shelter us from the storm, then spread

out our sleeping bags. After supper, we dug a ditch down each side of our camp to keep the water away from our beds and food.

The thunder and lightning lasted so long Doug began to talk about breaking camp in the morning and riding out to see if we had any fires. Don slept next to me through the night and hardly moved a muscle. He had taken his first long ride — over fourteen miles — and it was another nine miles out to the end of the Seven Lakes Trail. Snoopy appeared to be overjoyed that Don was with us. He never let him out of his sight. Even during the night the dog slept by Don's side as though to protect him from man and beast. Snoopy had chased away a good many animals during the night in Seven Lakes Basin to keep them from chewing and gnawing the pack rigging or getting to our food.

Brinkie was one of the best kid horses I ever saw. She carried Don along the trail or across country wherever he wanted to go or stopped when he wanted to stop. When he got down and left the trail on foot, Brinkie would roll her eyes in his direction and wait patiently until he came back. When Don climbed up into the saddle, the process was amusing. He would take hold on the saddle strings and pull himself up until his foot reached the stirrup. Brinkie would lay her ears back just a little and flinch every time Don poked her in the belly or slipped and fell back to the ground. Finally, after a struggle he would make it to the saddle and get set. Brinkie wouldn't budge an inch until Don took hold of the reins and said, "Giddup." Each time Don got on Brinkie like that, Doug would keep warning him to be careful, she might kick or buck him off. Don ignored him completely and went right ahead and did as he pleased.

During the night, the rain slacked off and finally quit. At daylight there were patches of fog over Grass Lake and hanging on the ridges above us, but we could tell that it was going to be a sunny day. We all rolled out of our sleeping bags at once and built up a big fire. It took about two hours to eat breakfast and break camp. Don felt fine after having such a rough day. By 11:00 o'clock the fog pockets had almost disappeared and the day turned out to be beautiful. We rode the nine miles to the end of the trail and hauled the stock to Lodgepole.

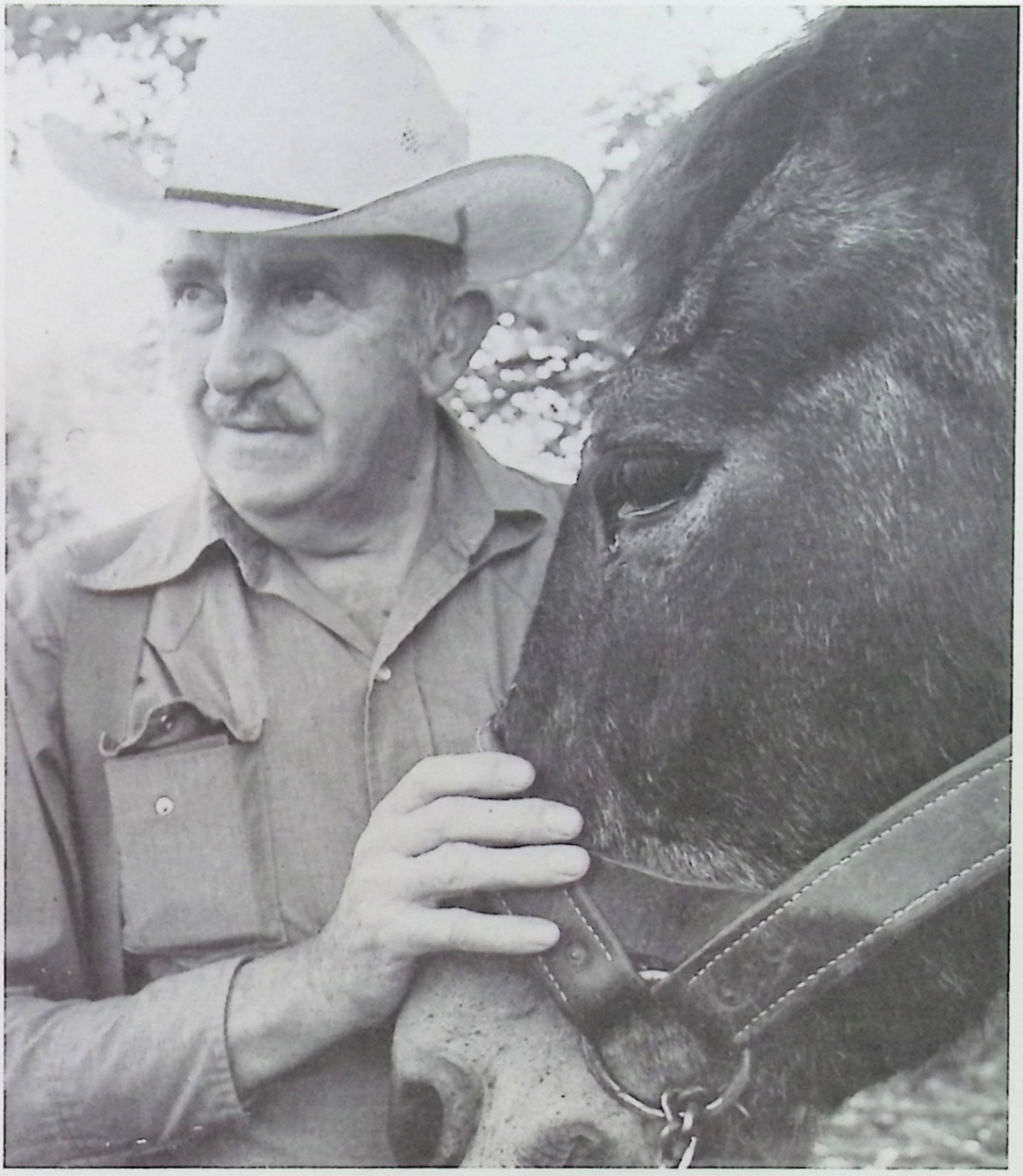
In the six years I lived and worked at the guard station, I made a good many pack trips on every district on the Rogue River National Forest. The two-day trip I took with my boy was the best trip of all because it was a dream come true for both of us. That was the only pack trip Don ever got to make with me.

Up to this date, 1976, four of my five kids are married and we have nine grandchildren, and one more on the way. Tricia manned a fire lookout for three summers, White Point and Tallow Box, on the Rogue River National Forest and the Smokey Bear Lookout in New Mexico. Janna and Leslie married Forest Service men, and Don is now one of the leaders in laying out timber sales. This summer he will have fifteen men working for him. Tracy is going to school in Grants Pass, Oregon.

Up to this moment, twenty some odd years later, I know of only two Forest Service horses that are worth riding out of the corral. Patches, a big red sorrel and Spook, my old brown buddy from Butte Falls are the ones. But if you ask anyone around these parts what kind of a horse Patches is, it would be all bad because there isn't anyone left that really knows a good horse when they see one. I sort of like it that way because with a reputation like that, the so-called riders and horsemen will leave him alone.

As long as there is a mule on the Rogue River National Forest, if you look around, I won't be far away. My intentions are to keep some of them around until someone says, "No, we don't have any use for them anymore."

I think of my packing days often, especially when the big horse Patches is between my knees and we hit the trail toward the tall and uncut. My memory and thoughts continually go back to the GOOD OLD DAYS during the six fabulous years I spent with my much loved Government mules.



Gordon Jesse Walker and Stella mule.
Last packer and last mule on the Rogue River National Forest.
The End of an Era.